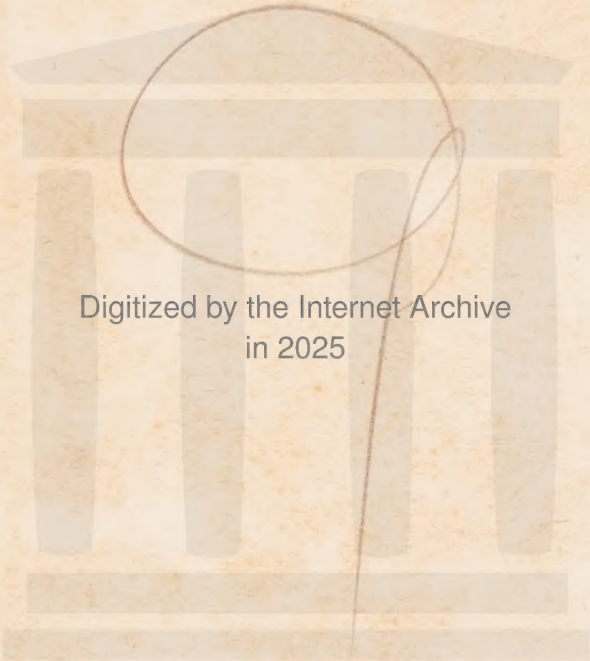
ROYAL GEORGIE

BY

S. BARING GOULD



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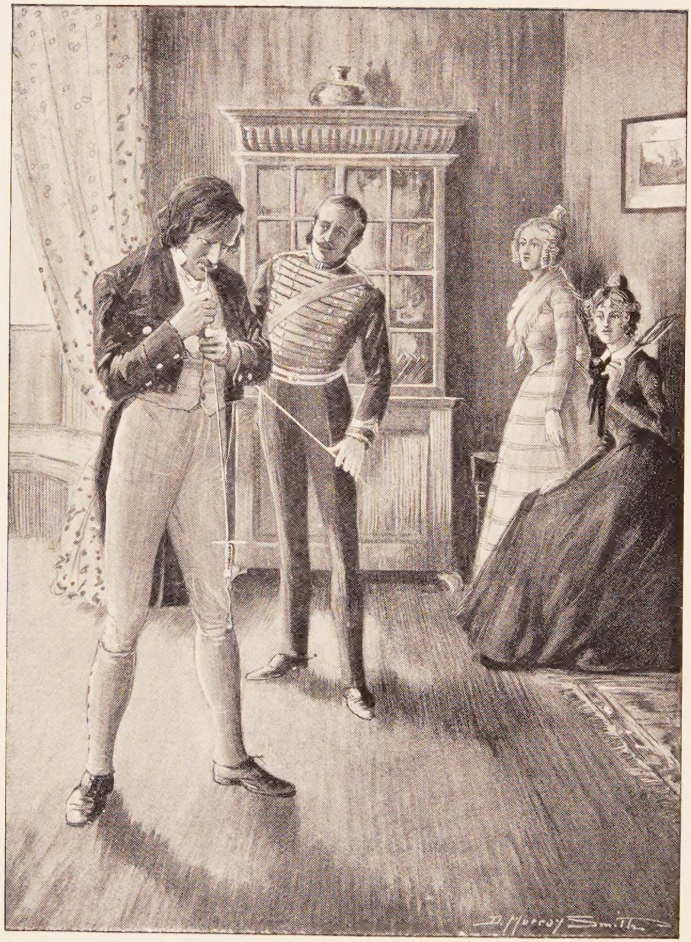
ROYAL GEORGIE

BY THE SAME AUTHOR

MEHALAH
IN THE ROAR OF THE SEA
THE QUEEN OF LOVE
CHEAP JACK ZITA
MRS. CURGENVEN OF CURGENVEN
ARMINELL
JACQUETTA
URITH
KITTY ALONE
MARGERY OF QUETHER
NOÉMI
THE BROOM-SQUIRE
DARTMOOR IDYLLS
GUAVAS THE TINNER
THE PENNYCOMEQUICKS
BLADYS
DOMITIA
PABO, THE PRIEST
WINEFRED



HE PUT THE END BETWEEN HIS TEETH AND TORE OFF THE BUTTON

PAGE 199

ROYAL GEORGIE

BY

S. BARING-GOULD

WITH EIGHT ILLUSTRATIONS BY D. MURRAY SMITH

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ROYAL GEORGIE

CHAPTER I

HIS MOST GRACIOUS MAJESTY

IN a small but snug dining-room, the wall hung round with guns, horsewhips, fox masks and pads, and upholstered with mahogany and leather, sat four gentlemen who had just finished their dinner, and were prepared for the flourish and finish of dessert.

The white cloth had been removed, green plates representing vine-leaves had been placed before them, in each of which stood a blue glass bowl, part filled with water, a small quadrangular crochet net intervening between the glass and the earthenware.

Nuts, apples, oranges, and brandy-cherries formed the dessert.

The fumes of roast goose with sage-and-onion stuffing still hung about the room, though, to the goose, plum-pudding had succeeded, together with mince-pies, both steeped in brandy. A diner who sat motionless did not perceive the savour; but should he turn his head, then the smell of goose was drawn across his face and thrust itself up his nostrils.

Heavy cut-glass decanters, containing port and sherry, in silver circular trays, stood on the table; but on one side, in the centre, before the host, space had been made to receive something even better than the best of good wines.

As goose is indigestible and onion self-assertive, the four diners had drunk freely to facilitate the operation of the

gastric juices; for the digestion in man is held to be of that inert character which cannot be roused to do its duty unstimulated, nor to continue in the exercise of its functions without incessant nudging.

Three of the gentlemen were flushed with wine; the fourth, the master of the feast, had a face that never reddened, but became glazed. He was a clergyman, wearing a loosely made black dress coat with a rolling collar, a very open waistcoat disclosing a frill, high shirt-collar, and much display of white kerchief.

His brow was lofty, white, and polished as a billiard ball. His eyebrows and hair were very light straw colour, and his eyes of an icy blue. The nose was well formed, the upper portion of his face refined, but the jaw was ponderous and the mouth fleshy.

The face was not bad, but unpleasant; the expression was acrid.

Every now and then the flabby lips moved and quivered, as he felt impelled to utter a sentiment, but he usually checked himself; the thought that had leaped to his lips died there unexpressed, as his steely eyes sought and probed the faces of those who sat at his table.

But when the conversation had dropped, and a silence had fallen on all present, then he drew a long breath, fumbled with his wine-glass, and said—

"Gentlemen, to-day, on the first anniversary of the accession of His Most Gracious Majesty"—his voice assumed a tone of bitterness as he applied the usual attributes to the king—"the first accession of His Most Gracious Majesty, George the Fourth, so soon as my ward, the Hebe to our Olympian board, shall bring in the punch, I shall propose the toast which you all, as loyal subjects, will drink with respect, and with due honours, standing."

Then suddenly lapsing from the formal tone to one of colloquialism, he added, "Though, by heaven and the bird of Jove, to me the Royal graciousness is as the splendour of the sun to the blind man—a thing to be believed in on the testimony of others, not to be perceived oneself."

"The sun shines alike on the seeing and on the blind," said

a gentleman on the right hand of the host, "but the perceptive faculty may be lacking here and there."

"It is not so with me," said the parson, "if for perceptive you substitute receptive. Receive I can, but nothing is given. See me, like Noah shut into the Ark, but unlike Noah, in that with him went clean beasts by sevens and the unclean in pairs. With me it is the reverse."

"And much you would feel in your element among clean beasts," said a man on the left, with a laugh.

"Here am I," continued the parson, disregarding the remark, "dropped into this inaccessible valley like Aladdin into that of diamonds, but there be no diamonds here, only bones. Inaccessible! Inexcessible, I mean, for there is no getting out of it. Here I am, and the only fellow-beings whom one can associate with are yourselves, gentlemen and fellow-sufferers, waifs cast on this inhospitable shore, criminals transported to a remote region out of the stream of life, out of the very sound of the voices of the world." He turned to a tall, dapper, thin man on his right, with keen eyes under bushy brown brows. "And you, Sir Thomas, you are in the like condition to myself."

"Pardon me, not in the same condition, though in a similar position—for I strive to accommodate myself to the place, and make the best of it. You do but writhe, and growl, and quarrel with your surroundings."

"What else would you have me do?" exclaimed the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby. "I am a man who have been bred about court, accustomed to society, have lived in the flush of town life. Here am I cast as a prisoner down an *oubliette*."

"Well, Thirkleby, you have your tithe to amuse yourself with getting in, and then spending."

"Tithe! A beggarly pittance! Is there sport—is there not humiliation to a gentleman of my fine-strung nerve and high temperament to be badgering bumpkins? And spend! How can one spend where there are no pleasures to be bought?"

"I am the worst served," said a moon-faced man, with black mutton-chop whiskers, and restless dark eyes. "I lent the

prince fifteen thousand pounds, and was paid with a lease of fifteen thousand acres for ninety-nine years, at a nominal rent of half a crown. By Jove! I was assured it was an estate in Devon, which was the garden of England, and that the climate was comparable to that of the south of France, and I accepted with alacrity—then found myself the possessor of a desolate waste of bog and stone, elevated into the land of clouds. I have spent eight thousand pounds since I have been here, walling in my estate, building lodges, running a road of a mile and a half long, and beginning a wing of my mansion. By heaven! I might just as well have cast my money into Charybdis, that swallows and yields nothing. Not one penny return shall I see for my twenty-three thousand pounds."

"Hullett!" said the fourth, a man with a face flaming red, and with white hair, "you have not been such a confounded loser as myself. I bought of the duchy exclusive privilege to mine for tin in the southern half of the moor. I paid five-and-twenty thousand pounds for it—and what have I got? Refuse heaps. Refuse, and that alone! Refuse, sir!" He struck the table with his clenched fist, and added, "Not a —— ounce of metal in it all! Heaps only, heaps everywhere, that have been turned over and winnowed a hundred times already. Done I am—done to a cinder! By my body and soul, when one deals with someone at the top of the scale, one does not expect to be choused and cheated. One does not expect to find a blackleg with a certain ornament about it that should adorn and honour a gentleman. Here have I been these six months chucking away good money after bad, searching for tin and finding none. It was here at one time, I daresay—the old men's works proclaim that. The Phœnicians got their tin somewhere hereabouts, I suppose. But what I do know, and that to my cost—to the cost of some twenty-five thousand pounds—is, that they carried away all, and left none behind."

"Davey," said the parson, "we four have all served His Most Gracious Majesty before even the titles of Gracious and Majesty in the superlative accrued to him. We have served him with our abilities, our time, and our purses. And now that we can be of no further use, we are cast aside as stale mistresses and unprofitable servants. It is the old story of

Hal the prince and Henry the king—and his Falstaff, Pym, and Bardolph."

"What I maintain, Tyrwhitt," said Hullett, who was working himself into livid fury, "what I assert and maintain is, that we owe you something for this. You have been the reverse of Dives in the parable. He sought to keep his brethren out of the pickle into which he had floundered, whereas you have exerted your persuasive powers to lure us into the same detestable place."

"There is much to be made out of the moor," said Sir Thomas, maintaining his temper.

"Yes, by such as yourself, as Warden of the Stannaries," roared Davey. "A fine elevation at which to catch gulls."

"And it was by your advice," said Hullett, leaning across the board, and spluttering with rage, "acting on your counsel, that I closed with the offer of the fifteen thousand acres. Not a word was breathed to me that they were situated fifteen hundred feet above the sea."

"You are wrong in thinking that you have been deceived," said Sir Thomas coolly; "you can grow flax."

"Grow?—but how? Short as my bristles when I have not shaved for a week. Who will buy fibre like that?"

"Then oats."

"Grow, yes—ripen, never!" Hullett uttered an oath—"I have been fairly bubbled by a"—

"Hist!" said the parson, "be careful of your words."

"Am not I to squeak when pinched that the life is pressed out of me?"

"Or I?" shouted Davey.

"Gentlemen," said Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, leaning back in his chair and folding his arms, "you have none of you been bubbled. Here are two hundred square miles of virgin soil, a country undiscovered and untested, in the very midst of our culture and civilisation. It cries out to be colonised and utilised; more than half of this region belongs to the Crown, and has belonged for a quarter of a century to His Majesty, as appanage of the Prince of Wales. Columbus found the New World, and I flatter myself that I have invented Dartmoor. Was Columbus capable at first of gauging the

capabilities of America? I tell you that the New World has yet"—

"By the frown of Zeus, Tyrwhitt," interrupted the parson, "this accursed region has been abandoned because there is nothing to be made out of it."

"Or because all it had has been sifted out of it," threw in Davey.

"I, vicar," said the knight, "have more trust in Providence than have you, though you wear its livery. This huge upland region, I hold, was not created without a purpose. We must exercise patience, use discretion, and discover its capabilities."

"Manuring it with our gold," said Hullett, in a fume.

"Some capital must be sunk, but that is inevitable if a return be desired. We may make mistakes till we find the clue—but in the end we shall discover that it will lead up to a fortune."

"I do not believe a word of it," burst forth Hullett. "I shall stop my works at Stannon. I cannot afford to lose more money."

"You have begun at the wrong end—mansion-building with stately lodges and stables before you have tested what the soil will do for you."

"And I shall throw up the mines," said Davey.

"You," said Sir Thomas, turning to the last speaker, "you have no cause to complain. Tin has abounded here from the time of the Phœnicians. Tin extracted hence made Richard, Earl of Cornwall, the wealthiest prince in Christendom, and caused his election to be emperor. Tin, extracted hence, in the reign of Elizabeth, paid for the arms that drove the Spaniards from our shores. All the methods practised by the ancients were antiquated. They skimmed the surface, they never bored into the arteries of the body. We, with our improved methods, with our advanced science, with our mechanical appliances, should obtain bushels where they contented themselves with grains. As to you, Hullett, consider the fatness of the virgin soil."

"Oh, the soil may be good, but the climate is nought. Here are we four met to-night. Two of us are heavy losers, and two are gainers by transportation to this British Siberia."

"Do you dare to regard me as a gainer?" said the parson.

"Why not? Say that your tithe is nothing, you have the guardianship of your niece."

"My ward, sir!"

"Oh, we all know who she is."

"If you know so little of your own affairs as to fool away twenty thousand pounds and more, you are not likely to know much of mine."

"Zounds, sir! everyone knows."

"Knows what?" asked the parson, closing his lips tightly, and his steely eyes were levelled upon Hullett as bayonet points.

"Come now, Thirkleby, what is her surname? Has she one?"

The vicar's brow became suffused with moisture.

"I refuse to answer impertinent questions," was his reply, in a hard voice.

"She is no daughter of your brother, if you have one," said Hullett in his irritation and stupidity caused by drink, regardless of the unseemliness of his behaviour to the host at whose table he sat.

"No," said Thirkleby; "I have no brother."

"Yet she is Georgina Thirkleby; is she your sister's child?"

The parson dashed his glass of port wine in the face of the questioner. Hullett sprang to his feet with an oath, seized a silver-branched candlestick, and whirled it as a weapon, showering the molten wax over his coat, and casting the candles upon the table. He swung his body back, so as to level a blow at the vicar.

At that moment the door was thrown open, and a tall, handsome girl entered, bearing a steaming bowl of punch.

Instantly Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt leaped to his feet—

"Hullett! Hold off, you madman! Stay him, Davey! In the house of his host! A quarrel is an indecency! Here!"

He stretched his long arm across the table, and wrenched the candlestick from the hand of Hullett, whose face was dripping and his shirt-front stained with port.

"Here!" shouted he. "Gentlemen, a toast! a toast! To Royal Georgie!"

He turned, lifted his wineglass, and bowed towards the maiden with the upraised bowl.

Hullett staggered, recovered his equipoise, turned round, saw the girl, instantly snatched up his glass, flourished it above his head, spilling its contents over his hair and collar, and shouted, "The Accession Day! I kiss her hand. The Blood Royal!"

"Set down the punch-bowl!" said Sir Thomas, "I gave Royal Georgie only."

Davey had heaved himself from his seat.

He, like Hullett, was half tipsy. He assumed a courtly air, and reeled forward. From his side of the table rolled Hullett, and each, regardless that the girl's hands were engaged holding the bowl, sought to disengage one on either side, to kiss it.

"Uncle!" exclaimed the girl.

But the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby remained leaning back in his chair, motionless, his two hands gripping the table; and he said never a word.

"Uncle," she cried again, not so much in alarm as in wrath, disgust, contempt; and she dashed between her tipsy adorers, sending them reeling from her, and set the bowl on the table with such violence that it cracked, and the steaming, savoury, generous liquor gushed forth, suffused the polished board, and poured down upon the floor.

Then, turning sharply about, she left the room.

"TO ROYAL GEORGIE!"

CHAPTER II

"THE WILDERNESS AND SOLITARY PLACE"

SIR THOMAS TYRWHITT, formerly Usher of the Black Rod, had been a favourite of the Prince of Wales, and had served him in many capacities, had helped him in his financial difficulties, and had been a companion in his orgies. He was a man of polished exterior, courtly manners, and considerable adroitness. But he was more than that; he was a far-seeing man, with a head full of schemes, and with a persuasive tongue, which enabled him to convince others that his schemes were practicable. The prince, when he became regent, had made him Steward of the Duchy of Cornwall and Warden of his Stannaries, with the object of extorting out of both as much money as could be wrung, so as to meet His Royal Highness's recurring financial difficulties, and, by relieving him from pressing liabilities, enable him to plunge with light heart into others that were fresh. Sir Thomas had planted himself on one of the wildest portions of the wild upland region of Dartmoor, had built himself a mansion which, in honour of his master, he named Prince's Hall; and this was a convincing evidence of his sincerity, for there were plenty of pleasant places lying low by shining waters, in grassy lawns and embowered in trees, that belonged to the extensive territory pertaining to the duchy; but he turned his back on these to create a new world where there was nothing. Louis XIV. converted a sandy waste into a Versailles, Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt established as the nucleus of his new creation — a prison. This establishment was designed to contain the captives taken in the great European war. Where prisoners were, there, Sir

Thomas argued, must be officials, warders, and military. Where were these latter, there must also be shops from which they could supply themselves with necessaries. And thus far he was not wrong in his calculations. There came into existence that disconsolate, hideous assemblage of houses, tarred to keep out the rain, and looking like a colony in deepest mourning, which, also in honour of His Royal Highness, he named Prince Town.

Unfortunately for Sir Thomas's calculation, the European war came to an end; Buonaparte was dismissed to St. Helena, the prisoners of war were sent home, and life at Prince Town suffered sudden arrest. But Sir Thomas never despaired, and, to some extent, his anticipations have been realised. The world does not stand still. At the beginning of the century there was one general store at Prince Town; a century has passed and there are now two.

Sir Thomas had erected an hotel, to which an occasional visitor came on constraint, upon business. His business ended, he turned his back on this rain-lashed, fog-enveloped, wind-blown settlement.

Sir Thomas saw that the wilderness could not be made to blossom as a rose, unless it were made accessible by roads, and he had excellent highways engineered athwart it; but the roads saw little traffic; and if they served to bring the crawling visitor to his town, their excellence accelerated his retreat.

Sir Thomas was of a sanguine temperament. He was convinced that the elevated plateau of Dartmoor, which, after a fashion, he may be said to have discovered, was calculated to become an El Dorado, if properly exploited. With a confidence that was wholly sincere, and, of course, with the purpose of increasing the value of his royal master's duchy, he laboured to induce capitalists to embark in speculations connected with the moor; but the event showed that he had lured them, one and all, to their ruin.

The Reverend Josiah Thirkleby had been chaplain to the Prince of Wales till, in 1811, the latter had been appointed regent, whereupon the Reverend Josiah was dismissed to an

incumbency far from town—in a word, to Wellcombe in the moor and out of the world; possibly—with the exception of Lundy Isle—the situation the least desirable to, or desired by, such a man as Mr. Thirkleby.

Wellcombe lies in a valley between lofty ridges and extensive stretches of moorland, from which it was not possible to escape by following the river, as the Wellburn that flows through the valley debouches through a gorge. The sole means of exit is by ascent up roads like torrent tracks at the incline of a church roof, and these lead to desolate stretches of wilderness, strewn with "clatters" of granite, and treacherous with unfathomed morasses. In itself the valley is not amiss. It is an oasis in the desert. Owing to the contraction of the throat of the valley, at some former period it had been a lake, till filled up with granite detritus, and on this rubble the earth lies deep, lush with the greenest grass, and sycamores grow in it to magnificent proportions. It is sheltered from east and west winds; but the walls of moor that cut off the gales also shut out the rising and the setting sun, and shorten the day to the inhabitants.

Almost every parish has contiguous parishes that maintain resident squires and parsons. But Wellcombe is, and always was, exceptional in this particular. To the west lies Lydford, a parish that comprises sixty thousand acres, and it is a day's journey to the parsonage house; one, moreover, always held—as it was but a cottage, and the value of the living nought—by an absentee in the duchy incumbency elsewhere—usually in another county. On the other sides the ragged tors, the bogs, and the heathery moors are crossed by tracks, not roads, making visiting a matter of danger and difficulty, only to be attempted in summer. The nearest town was itself in a state of inanition at the beginning of the century. Ashburton had once been the seat of a flourishing wool trade, but the invention of the power-loom had killed the business, and the town had sunk into that languor that usually precedes death.

Ashburton is actually but twelve miles distant, but such miles—of desperate scramble to attain a great height, whence the traveller is exposed to the furious gales that rush

from the Atlantic, and where there is not a particle of shelter.

As chaplain to the prince the Reverend Josiah would have held a position difficult and distressing had he been a conscientious man. That prince was not remarkable for personal piety, deep convictions, and moral rectitude. But Mr. Thirkleby was too much of a gentleman and too little of a Christian to rebuke his royal master for his laxity of living. There is nothing more kindly received than such neglect when the duty consists in a reminder that is unpleasant.

The Reverend Josiah had taken part in that dissipation, extravagance, and disregard of responsibilities which is pleasantly called "life." It had been his dream that, on the coming to the throne of his royal master, he would be rewarded for his service and servility with a deanery, at the least with a canonry.

For reasons that had been hinted at rather than expressed, he had been translated from court and dropped into this isolated spot, the spot of all others least open to observation, where, having no neighbours, his conduct and his household would be less open to criticism and question than in any other in Great Britain.

When the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby came to Wellcombe he brought with him a young girl whom he called his ward. Her Christian name was Georgina, and she addressed the vicar as uncle. She was then but eight years old. The vicar was unmarried, and never had possessed a wife. He gave out, casually, indifferently, that the child, though a relative, was not actually his niece; but always in a tone that showed that he was sovereignly indifferent to what people thought about their relations. It was not till Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt had settled at Prince's Hall, and that some men about town and court had paid him a visit there, and had ridden across the moor to call on the Reverend Josiah, that rumours began to circulate about the girl, attributing to her an origin very different from that hitherto supposed.

It was now remembered that Mr. Thirkleby on his arrival had shown himself very flush of money, and that his manner

of living had been wholly out of proportion to the modest income derived from the parish. He had disdained to occupy the vicarage and to put his head under its thatched roof, and had purchased the Manor—or that relic of it which remained, and which was without a house upon it. Thereon he had built himself a square mansion in the tasteless style of the Regency, which, if not beautiful, was at least roomy and commodious. The vicarage he had converted into cottages, and had let.

Those who thought about him at all, such as saw him occasionally in the market town, wondered why a man of means, high in favour at court, should bury himself in the midst of Dartmoor. They asked how it was that when the Crown had good livings at its disposal, the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby, chaplain to the prince, should be given a dean-and-chapter living; and it was then recalled that simultaneously with the presentation of Thirkleby to Wellcombe, a fat Crown living had been offered to the son of the Dean of Exeter. A job had clearly been perpetrated, but for what purpose?

Folk looked hard at Georgina, and shook their heads. She, they said, was the key to the mystery. Some intimated that they could trace a resemblance in the profile of the daring, high-spirited young girl, to that which adorned the new coinage. Whereat others laughed derisively, and asked what possible likeness there could be between an obese, elderly, and worn-out *bon vivant* and a young, fresh, and innocent maiden, slim as a willow wand.

The Reverend Josiah had parted with what scruples of conscience he possessed when he had danced attendance on the prince. Then no other duties had devolved on him than saying grace at table on state occasions, and occasionally reading prayers on Sunday. When he arrived to take charge of a rural parish, he was troubled with no sense of responsibility for the souls committed to him to pasture; he held that he satisfied the requirements of the Church if he said prayers and preached weekly. His parishioners he left to follow their lawless wills, and be led by their turbulent passions, unrestrained and unreproved. In this he was impartial; that he

neglected his humble charge as thoroughly, in this particular, as he had fallen short towards the highest, to whom he had been chaplain.

Nevertheless, the vicar maintained a certain external decorum, not, it is to be surmised, out of any other consideration than a desire to appear without offence in the eye of the public, the only eye he ever considered. It cannot be said that Mr. Thirkleby disbelieved in the creed he professed. He did not trouble himself to think about it. It was a matter of indifference to him whether it were true or false.

What he lived for, the goal of his ambition, was preferment, and that to a stall in some cathedral city, where he might meet with congenial spirits, men of culture, and where, above all, there was nothing to be done but to enjoy himself. Such was the man to whom was entrusted the bringing up of a young and impressionable maiden.

A child gauges the character of those with whom it has to do with unerring instinct, independent of reason.

Georgie grew up without either respect or love for her "uncle." At first she regarded him with awe, fearing him, but now she feared him no longer. He invariably paid her a sort of courtly deference. He had never stooped to play with her; never concerned himself to teach her anything, least of all what belongs to religion. She had been allowed to grow up almost wild, schooled but slightly in early childhood, unchecked, undirected, unencouraged, imperfectly educated, a creature of caprice and passion. He had not concerned himself about her present, and gave no thoughts to her future, save as it might affect himself.

Of late he had come to regard her with veiled dislike, which, however skilfully disguised, she was keen to perceive. This dislike was due, perhaps, to the fact that it was humiliating to his pride to discover that he had been seen through by a child, weighed in her imperfectly adjusted balances, and found wanting. Perhaps, if what was whispered relative to her and himself were true, he resented being relegated on her account to Wellcombe, out of the world, and cut off from the associates whom he took pleasure in meeting, and from the pleasures which alone made life supportable. Existence—it was not life

—in Wellcombe was intolerable to a man of his parts, accustomed to society that was socially, though not intellectually, brilliant. His position had become slightly easier since Hullett and Davey had come to reside within reach, but with neither was the Reverend Josiah on familiar terms. These men were not the butterflies of a court, but the beetles of commerce. To talk with them of old court scandals was to converse about persons of whom they knew nothing. And, worst of all, they could tell him no news of those with whom he had been acquainted. The Londoner feels that he is in a strange atmosphere if three or four smuts do not fall on his nose in the course of the day: and into this moorland valley dropped none of the anecdotes, innuendoes, that rained on him daily when in town.

The seclusion of Wellcombe had not encouraged among the inhabitants the patriarchal and primitive virtues. On the contrary, it had fostered an independent spirit that disregarded every restraint, for it acknowledged none, and assumed a character of insolence to outsiders.

The people were grossly superstitious at the same time that they were utterly irreligious. They were suspicious of intruders, and disliked such as belonged to another class than their own.

The vicar had been received with coldness, which gave way when they found that he had no thought of interfering with their vices. They showed him little outward respect; but he, on his part, did not expect or require it of them. What were they to him but a set of ignorant clodhoppers whose opinion he did not value at a rush. It might have been supposed that when the strange rumour circulated relative to the exalted parentage of Georgina, the people would have been pleased and proud to have her in their valley, a flower—and a very comely one—in their wilderness. On the contrary, they took alarm and resented her presence as an intrusion, as one by means of whom the outer world would possibly some day be brought to take some notice of them and of their doings. And suspicion is twin-sister to aversion.

As Georgina left the dining-room her cheek flamed and her eyes gleamed with anger. She passed quickly through the

kitchen, and said to the housekeeper, "I have broken the great bowl and have spilt the punch. I care not that!"—she snapped her fingers. "I shall go to Alse!" Without another word, without shawl or hat, though it was midwinter, without a lantern, though it was night, she left the house.

CHAPTER III

SIR THOMAS

GEORGINA ran along the road, under a starry sky, in an air crisp with frost. She did not dread encountering anyone. The lane—it was that rather than road—was haunted by a black calf with goggle eyes that rose out of a grave in the churchyard, leaped the wall, and trotted along the way after any foot passenger.

Georgina was not without superstitious fears, but in her excitement she gave at the moment no thought to the churchyard calf.

As she ran on, the cool air on her brow soothed her, the stars shone so calmly that her anger abated. She desisted from running, and walked. A quarter of a mile from the Manor House was the cottage of Alse Grylls, towards which she had directed her steps.

She saw a red glow through the rift, for the door was ajar, and the flicker through the tiny windows. But she did not enter at once; she walked past the cottage, turned, repassed it, and turned again. The tears were coursing down her cheeks. To the anger that had flamed in her heart, succeeded a sense of desolation.

Was there ever a girl so lonely as herself, without father or mother, with no relatives save an uncle who, as he declared, was not her uncle, was naught but a guardian.

Every plant had the fibres of its root spreading around it; she had no attachments. Every child had someone to whom it could turn as relative; she was without kindred. Who she was, whence she came, why she was placed with the Reverend Josiah she did not know.

Insinuations, jokes, were bandied at her expense. These she heard without understanding them. She had no girl friends, never had companions. She had clung to her horse as nearer and dearer to her than any human being. Thoughts had tossed in her brain, feelings had boiled in her heart, and she had been unable to give them expression. There were none to understand, none to sympathise with, none to pity her.

She was growing into womanhood. Imaginations, dreams troubled her; she did not know whether her fancies had any reality in them, whether her dreams were the penumbra of truth.

There was one, and one person only, with whom she was at all open, and that was Alse Grylls, whom she called granny because the woman was old, not because there was any relationship subsisting between them.

The woman could read and write, and was eager to possess and to devour books; but what she took in remained, unassimilated, in a jumble in her brain.

Yet the fact of her having read books was sufficient to cause her to be regarded with mistrust, and to be considered a wise woman. The cottage door was ajar, because through the stunted chimney the smoke could not otherwise escape. This was a general defect, and for generations the inconvenience had been endured without an attempt at remedying it by giving height to the chimney. In a climate less mild this would have been intolerable. But the peasant in the west of England has become accustomed thus to live in a draught as the only remedy to being smothered in smoke.

Presently, when a little calmed down, Georgie passed through the doorway without tapping. The old woman was seated in the chimney nook, knitting and smoking, with the red glare of the burning peat suffusing her face, and the scarlet kerchief bound over her grizzled hair and under her chin blazed in the light like the petals of a poppy.

Georgie seated herself uninvited on a stool on the farther side of the hearth. The old woman withdrew her pipe, straightened her back, looked at her, then resumed smoking and let her shoulders sink again. She said nothing, waiting till the girl should speak.

Georgie clasped her hands about a knee, having crossed her legs, and she swayed herself in quick vibrations in the firelight, looking into the glowing turves with knit brows and clouded eyes.

She was a handsome girl, with rich, abundant dark hair, a somewhat long but finely shaped face, the mouth perhaps unduly large, but firm though flexible.

"I have scat the big bowl," she said shortly, after a long continuance of silent rocking.

"I cannot mend cloam [pottery]," replied the woman, "though I can patch hearts."

Then ensued another silence, of equally long continuance. This was finally broken by Granny Grylls, who said—

"It is not for the scat bowl that you come here at night, and that you walked three times by my door without coming in, and that the tears be still glazing your cheeks."

"No, granny, it is not. I want to know something."

"What is that?"

"They called me 'The Blood Royal.'"

"Who did that?"

"The gentlemen who are dining with uncle. They were tipsy, or I should have taken down a horsewhip from the wall and lashed them till they explained their meaning. Now, if I go back, I shall find them drunk under the table, incapable of speech. What did they mean by saluting me sometimes as Blood Royal and at others as Royal Georgie?"

"Did your uncle allow it?"

"He sat speechless."

"What he will not explain, that it is not for me to talk about."

Georgie sprang to her feet and paced the room; she was angry again.

"I am not a child, I will know!" she stamped. "I am tormented with things thrown in my face—jests, jibes; and I hear laughter behind my back at some things passed in whispers. The Wellcombe folk dislike me, and I do not know why, and my uncle hates me. No, that is not true; he looks at me with his stony blue eyes as though he were reckoning what I would be worth to him, or whether he would not be

happier with me out of the way. What does all this mean? Why am I so treated? And these gentlemen, why did they shout out 'The Blood Royal!' and stumble towards me to bend their knees and kiss my hand? But so tipsy were they, that they would have fallen on their noses had they knelt."

Then she laughed; but with bitterness, not mirth, in the tone, and cut the laugh short, with an impatient stamp and jerk of her elbows.

"I am not a child—I will know," she repeated, and continued pacing the cottage floor.

"I know nothing," said the old woman; "no one knows aught for sure and certain—none but the parson. As to the talk of folk—what is that worth?"

"But I want to know what their talk is."

"Oh, they have their silly fancies."

"Tell me what their fancies are, and I can judge then if they be silly."

Granny Grylls hesitated.

The girl arrested her steps, swung herself round, and folded her arms.

"Alse, I will be told. You shall tell me. You know my way. When I have made up my mind to a thing, nothing can move me."

"Ay, you're an obstinate wench."

"I will be told. I am dangerous. I shall go mad if you do not speak out."

The old woman removed the pipe from her mouth, and slowly knocked the ashes out on the hearth. Then she rested one sharp elbow on her knee, and leaned her head in the hand thus raised, and steadily looked at the girl.

"Folk tell—but, lor' a mussy, what are their words worth, living here in this lone spot? Folks tell that you're a king's daughter—king of the pixies, maybe."

"No," said Georgie, "not the child of any pixy. I was not born on Dartmoor."

"Where, then, were you born?"

"I do not know—I know nothing; but uncle brought me here, and I had been in London before that. Neither he nor

I ever set foot on these moors till we came here. I can remember; I was at school in London."

"You know as much as I do."

"They mean that I am the king's child, the daughter of King George. I am sure they do. I begin to see it now. Then my mother should have been queen."

"Your mother is dead; and Prince George was not king till last year. And he has a queen whom he has driven away—so I hear tell."

"She is not my mother; I was born before he married her. I saw about that in one of my uncle's newspapers." Then suddenly, "Why should the one daughter be Princess Charlotte and the other daughter only plain Georgina?"

"Let me escort you home, my dear Miss Thirkleby," said a voice at the door. "I, perhaps, am better able to answer your queries than this ignorant old woman."

Georgina turned herself about abruptly and saw Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, with his hat off, smiling and bowing.

"Allow me," said he, as Georgina did not answer him, "allow me the honour of conducting you back to your guardian's house. I grieve at the discourtesy that drove you from it."

"It was you who set them on."

"I solicit your forgiveness. I caught at the first opportunity that presented itself to stop an unseemly quarrel. I apologise."

"You threw me to those intoxicated gentry, as you might cast a pillow between two fighting dogs. It was courteous and becoming in a gentleman and a knight! I thought it was the prerogative of knights to succour forlorn damsels—but we live in topsy-turvy days."

"Miss Thirkleby, you did not perhaps perceive the urgency of the case. Mr. Hullett, blinded with passion, would have brained your uncle with the candlestick."

"Well, it is over. I desire no further excuses."

She went outside the cottage.

"Suffer me," said Sir Thomas, "to offer you my support."

"Thank you," replied Georgie, "I do not need a stick."

"You are revenging yourself on me."

"I never forgive."

They walked side by side along the lane, in silence. Presently she said, "I was wrong in saying that I never forgive. I sell forgiveness as a marketwoman deals in eggs. If you care for mine—pay me my price."

"And that price is a frank and full answer to your dozen of questions."

"You have guessed aright."

"Your guardian has, I presume, told you nothing?"

"Nothing—absolutely."

"Then you place me in a difficult position."

"Pardon me; you have placed yourself there—not I. It was you who gave the toast that demands explanation."

"Let us avoid names, and then I can speak freely," said Sir Thomas. "Remember, we are on a high road."

"Oh, there are none here to overhear; it is the run of the church-calf till midnight. Tell me who I am."

"Miss Georgie," said the knight in a kindly tone, "it is right that you should know something of the nature of the talk that goes on respecting you. Whether it be idle speculation, whether there is a basis of truth, how much of it is truth, all that your uncle alone can say. The story goes that one in the highest position in the land is your father. But he cannot own you. In youth he made a great mistake—a fatal mistake, as far as you are concerned. It was more than a mistake, a great wrong was done to one now in her grave. He was at the time young or inconsiderate, and he was not then what he is now. Years pass, eighteen or nineteen, that is your age, and he is elevated to be the observed of all, criticised by all, surrounded by such as would tear the veil from his life, and expose him with all his weaknesses, errors, follies, to the public scorn. Is it not explicable that he should endeavour to cover up that past indiscretion?"

"Explicable in a weak man," said Georgina. "A strong one would not attempt this. He would say, 'I erred, which of you who condemn me can say you are free from mistakes?'"

"That may be so. But too much may depend on him for him to dare to risk this. At the present moment he is the most unpopular man in the kingdom. There is simmering

impatience. It needs but little to provoke a general outburst such as took place in France in '98."

Georgina did not speak.

"You are sorry that you broke your uncle's precious bowl?"

"Yes."

"There is no mending it, I suppose?"

"No."

"Mind you! I do not say that there is any truth whatever in the prevalent gossip. But supposing it to be true, a most impossible supposition by the way, then in a thoughtless moment would you do that which might smash to atoms something far more precious, something impossible again to restore?"

"That?"

"The Crown."

CHAPTER IV

REVELATIONS OF A MAN ABOUT COURT

"WHERE the devil have you been, Tyrwhitt?" asked the parson, as Sir Thomas re-entered the dining-room.

Hullett and Davey had reached that stage in drinking when for a while there is no visible progress in intoxication.

Wine that maketh glad the heart of man had restored cheerfulness to the countenance of Davey. He had forgotten his losses, forgotten the topic of conversation, and sat smiling as he turned his face from one speaker to another, without uttering any words of his own. Hullett had lost what sharpness he had, and had lapsed into a condition of general obtuseness.

"I have been," said the knight, "to make my peace with your niece."

"My ward," interrupted the vicar, upon whom the liquor he had imbibed had acted as an irritant.

"Do you deny that she is your niece?" asked Hullett, who, like most dull men, never knew how to avoid a dangerous topic.

"I deny that you have any right to assume such a relationship," said Thirkleby.

"Come, come," said Hullett, "we will not ask or seek to discover who was her mother; but it is idle for you to deny her parentage. That—that everyone knows."

"If you know her parentage," said Thirkleby, "then you can appreciate my position. Mind you, I do not assert it. I do nothing of the kind. But, for argument's sake, let us

assume it. Granted that she be what you suppose. Granted that I have been constituted guardian to a headstrong, undisciplined girl, with such an origin. I do not assert this —I say I assume it. That is all. Now, on this assumption is it not outrageous that I — that I, a man of culture, of refinement, a man accustomed to a life about court, to pleasure, should be thrust into this confounded hole where— where, gentlemen, I have been left for all these years. I have been here, an exile, and all for the sake of this girl, all these years." He had forgotten that all he said was based on mere assumption. He grew livid in his rage, the lines in his pallid face deepened. "I have been made responsible for the health, the well-being, the conduct of this girl, my ward," he pursued, spluttering with anger, "and I know that you, Tyrwhitt, are set as a spy to watch me, and report to head-quarters concerning me!"

"Mr. Thirkleby," said the knight, rising from his seat, "when you were, as you say, cast as a waif into this accursed hole, you shed all your breeding, and dispensed with your good manners."

Sir Thomas took his hat.

"No offence," shouted the irate parson. "You can't help yourself, you are set your task; I am set mine. I do not bear you a grudge. I bear a grudge against your employer and mine. Tyrwhitt, I tell you something. You may repeat it if you will, and to whom you will. I do not care one raisin"; he put his hand into a dessert dish, but finding, in his nervous heat, that he could not pluck a raisin from the stalk, he contented himself with an almond, which he flipped across the table. "Tyrwhitt, I shall endure this exile no longer. Do you know the story of the old hunter that was sent to the knackers? When his master chanced on the horse-skull, he kicked it, and the tooth pierced his boot and wounded his toe. This wound became gangrened, and occasioned his death. Sir Thomas, a trusted servant carries with him the means of revenge, if he be not treated according to his merits and deserts."

Sir Thomas laid aside his hat without reseating himself, leaned his knuckles on the mahogany board, and looking

steadily and with set features into the eyes of his host asked—

"What do you mean, Thirkleby? A trusty servant is ever true! What has been confided to his confidence is sacred to the end."

"Service is a compact—give and take. Each seeks his own end."

"A servant must be trusted. No master engages one except on the understanding that his secrets shall be held sacred."

"I don't see it, by the thunders of Jove—I do not! I have a tooth in my old head that has a poison behind it, and can wound and instil its virus into the foot that kicks me aside. What do I mean, Tyrwhitt? Sit down, man; no offence intended. We are all jolly good fellows—jolly companions every one. Sit down, Sir Thomas, and I will show you something that will make you see that I am not a man to be trifled with."

The knight resumed his chair. His face was grave, even anxious, his eyes piercing and observant. He had drunk, but his brain was clear. He was too shrewd, too cautious a man ever to allow himself to be overcome. He was too much a man of the world, too good company ever to allow it to be seen that he did not drink as much as others. Hullett had his elbows on the table. Davey was doubled up in his chair; he needed but another glass to send him sliding out of it, but his ears were open.

The parson rose to leave the room. He was sufficiently master of himself to offer an apology for so doing. He was sufficiently obfuscated to mistake the hinges of the door for the handle, and to grope ineffectually on the wrong side for the means whereby to open. Eventually he discovered his mistake, and then laboured ineffectually to open by turning the handle the wrong way. Tyrwhitt's eyes observed him with interest and expectation, mixed with uneasiness. He made no attempt to assist his host to find the way out of his own room, but waited with coolness till he should leave. At length Mr. Thirkleby did open the door and pass through. Sir Thomas then looked at Hullett and addressed him, but met with no response, though he saw that he was attentive to

what went forward. The condition of Davey was obvious at a glance. He had gleams of apprehension only. Sir Thomas rested his elbow on the mahogany and planted his chin in his hand. Presently he dipped his finger in the bowl, moistened it, and drew it round the edge of the blue glass, eliciting a low musical note.

He was interrupted by the return of the vicar, holding aloft and flourishing a packet wrapped in brown paper, and with red tape about it crossed and sealed. A parchment label was attached.

"Read that!" said Thirkleby, in a tone of triumph, "read that!" He stretched the parcel towards the knight, then hastily withdrew it, and, with a look of cunning, said, "Nay, I will not suffer it to leave my hands. This is what is written on the parchment: 'Revelations of a Man about Court.' This manuscript is all in my handwriting. This half-ream of paper contains spiced anecdotes; but, mind you, lest they should be counted as fiction, there are letters, documents, subjoined, authenticating every statement. If this were given to the public by being printed"—

"There is no printer in England who would dare to set it up."

"That may be so. But if none be found in England, do you not suppose that I could get it printed abroad, in the Netherlands? in Paris? and have it smuggled into England for wide distribution? Do you doubt that it would sell? I tell you, Tyrwhitt, the demand would be ravenous, the sale would be prodigious. And that assured at a moment when the public mind is excited over the divorce of Queen Caroline."

"Man, you durst not do it."

"I durst do anything if driven to it. I tell you, Tyrwhitt, and I tell those who are behind you, I tell him to whom you serve as a screen and an ear, that I will not endure this banishment longer. Whilst I have a tooth in my head I will bite."

Sir Thomas had listened patiently, without moving from his attitude of calm attention. He waited a minute to allow the vicar to say what further he desired to communicate. As

Thirkleby made no sign of speaking more, he asked in a hard tone and with deliberation—

"Your alternative?"

"Ten thousand pounds."

"You are mercenary."

"Ten thousand pounds is a trifle. When I consider that the public temper is at present in a highly irritable condition, I consider that I put the price too low. Why, sir, were this" —he flourished his manuscript—"were this to appear I believe there would be a revolution, and that instead next year of commemorating the accession we would be deliberating a deposition, and that, I wager, with vast jubilation. Let the publication be forbidden, let the dissemination be contraband, the circulation would not be diminished. The demand would be quickened, new zest would be added to the procuring of the memoirs. Copies would pass from hand to hand, and every page would be devoured with avidity. There is that in this package," continued the angry man, tapping the bound and sealed bundle with one hand as he gripped it with the other, "there is enough here to serve as fulminating powder in men's brains, and to blow to flame men's coursing blood; that is, if there be any sense of decency, any moral dignity, any respect for virtue left in the people of Great Britain. And allow me to assure you, sir," he pursued in concentrated bitterness, "that there is such a force as righteous indignation. Though we may disbelieve in moral forces, nevertheless they exist. They lie latent, and do not obtrude themselves, but we are vastly mistaken if we deny, or even ignore, their existence. The longer they lie hid, the more they are gathering in intensity; and great is the folly of such as are caught by surprise when they vindicate themselves by a convulsion. Tyrwhitt, what, I ask of you, was the Revolution in France? Was it spontaneous combustion? There is no such thing. It was the bursting forth of repressed resentment against wrong-doing in high quarters, against disregard of men's rights. In England there is, at the present moment, a ferment working, a sullen, chafing, gathering rage, just as there was in France some twenty years ago. It needs but a word, the touch of a child's finger, and the volcano roars into action—the lava will

gush forth and consume whole classes, and devastate entire regions. Do not conceive that Europe has learned nothing from what has taken place in Paris. The people have acquired a lesson they will never forget—that they are many and that their oppressors are few. What has the House of Hanover done for the people of England?"

"It has delivered them from the House of Stuart. Is not that something?"

"The House of Brunswick-Hanover has been a figure-head. The people of England would have none of the Jacobite crew, with their backward treadings; but they have no relish for the Germans. What tangible, visible monument is there in the land to show they ever ruled here? The House of Tudor was strong. It gave us the Reformation. It gave grammar schools sprinkled all over the country, and a superb Royal foundation at one of our universities. It knew how to lavish its money on something other than drink and cards and women. The House of Stuart—it did this for the nation, by running its head against a wall: it forced the nation to assert its inherent rights. It did show us that the bogie of Divine Right was a turnip and a sheet on a broom. If Charles the First was a fool, he was, at all events, a picturesque one. And if Charles the Second was a wanton, he at least gave to the nation Greenwich Hospital. But what have the Hanoverians done? What stone has been set on another by their hands as a monument that they reigned over us, and gave something back as Royal donation of that which the people granted to them? What instance of generosity have these German Electors displayed? Do you think that the people love them? They tolerate them as the lesser of two evils. But convince the nation that they are breeders of moral contagion, violators of every sacred and social right, and 'Away with them!' will be the cry from one end of the island to the other."

"Hist! What are you saying?"

"I am saying that which is the truth, and you know it to be so," said the raging, livid man. Then he clasped his twitching fingers across his waistcoat, and leaned back, his face working and his fleshy lips quivering.

"Ten thousand pounds," said Sir Thomas.

"Ten thousand—not a penny less. I know a physician who had got into his possession a bundle of letters, and he said, 'Give me a baronetcy or I publish them.' He got his baronetcy, and the fire consumed the letters. I desire no empty title—not I. I demand no prebendal stall, for that entails irksome duties—a month's residence and attendance at daily prayers. Give me ten thousand pounds for my revelations, and then do with them what you will."

"Let me look at the work."

"No! I say, like the sibyl of old, 'Give me my price and take the pages unread.'"

Sir Thomas remained silent, and put his fingers over his mouth.

Presently he said, "Your ultimatum?"

"Ten thousand pounds or the consequences."

"How long do you give me to consider this?"

"One month from to-day. Not an hour over."

Then Sir Thomas looked level into the eyes of Josiah Thirkleby—eyes dazed with wine and wrath.

"Parson," said he, "do you know what you sell along with this budget?"

The vicar lifted his eyebrows.

"You dispose of—and for ever—all claim to the respect of honourable men. You get your ten thousand for your revelations, and reveal yourself a cur."

CHAPTER V

A WORD AND A BLOW

THE Reverend Josiah Thirkleby did not appear at breakfast on the morning that ensued. Georgie was in no way surprised. It would have been phenomenal had he done so on the morrow of an orgie. The vapours hang about the hills after a storm.

Before the vicar had put in an appearance she left the house, without having formed any definite purpose, but broadly desirous of inhaling fresh air and enjoying sun and exercise.

She was not herself as brisk as usual. The events of the preceding evening had fluttered and bruised the wings of her soul; she had not slept much or soundly. Her brain had been troubled with visions fantastic and illusory. Consequently, a sense of feverishness hung about her which the aspect of the morning gave promise of dispelling. The sun shone. A slight frost had crisped the herbage and had consolidated the mud.

Since her interview with Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt her mind had been agitated with half-forgotten recollections rising up before her, invested with a new significance.

She had no recollection of her parents. She had been placed, at an early age, in a school for little children. Her comrades had gone home for their holidays, but she had remained at school—at Christmas to look wistfully into the streets through the window-panes; in summer to play alone in the little garden.

During term time parents called to visit their children who

were pupils in the school. No father, no mother had ever inquired after her. As a parrot she had been taught to repeat the Lord's Prayer, but the opening address had conveyed no sense of tenderness and nearness of relationship to her solitary heart.

Now and then Mr. Thirkleby or some other gentleman had called to inquire after her or to see her, but none of these had exhibited towards her the least affection. It had occurred to none of them even to bring her bonbons or a doll. After a few formal words the visitor had departed, with a solemn adjuration addressed to her to be good, and not to give trouble to her preceptresses.

One day, as she recollected, Mr. Thirkleby had called for her, and had taken her with him in a coach. They had driven along the London streets till the carriage passed through a portal, at which stood red-coated sentries.

She remembered being handed out of the coach, and entering a spacious mansion, where were footmen in scarlet and gold wearing white stockings and with powdered heads.

She was hurried along passages; then was shown into a large room, with a few chairs against the wall, and there had waited with Mr. Thirkleby some time in silence, till they were presently ushered into a richly adorned and well-furnished apartment, where a glass chandelier hung from the ceiling, a novelty that at once attracted her attention.

In this room stood a stout, elderly gentleman wearing several waistcoats, a stiff cravat, and high collar. His hair was curled and twisted upon the top of his head, and his cheeks were florid. Georgie recollected that this portly gentleman had looked hard at her, then had stooped and kissed her on the brow. The stooping apparently demanded much exertion, and was accompanied by a sound of creaking and straining as of canvas.

When this personage had kissed her, he said something in a low tone to a gentleman at his side, whereupon both had laughed. This had at once offended and angered her, for she supposed that they were laughing at her, and she burst into tears.

Thereupon the gentleman in many waistcoats had said, "Remove this child. I detest squalling brats."

These words had burnt themselves into her memory, as had also the reply of Mr. Thirkleby—

"As your Royal Highness pleases."

Georgie had been wounded in her self-esteem by the laughter of the gentlemen, but these words employed by the portly personage made her little heart swell with anger.

She was hurried away along passages, and again taken to the coach.

No sooner was she therein, by the side of Mr. Thirkleby, than she had burst forth with, "I do not like that fat man. He is not a gentleman. I will not go to see him again."

At which her companion in the coach had drily replied, "You mistake. He is the first gentleman in England, and, my dear, you are not likely again to enjoy the honour of a presentation."

After this incident Georgie had been removed to a school at Bath. There she had been troubled by questions put to her by her fellow-pupils as to her parents, their position in life; as to her relatives, her home, and all those thousand particulars which girls worm out of their schoolfellows and lay by to produce, with cruel effect, at the first ruffle in their friendship.

But Georgie knew no more in these matters than that she was an orphan, that she had never seen her parents, and that she was under the wardship of an uncle.

Her holidays were henceforth spent at Wellcombe with him whom she came to regard as her uncle.

There she enjoyed freedom—absolute, after the restraint of school—such freedom as made school speedily become intolerable to her; and after some tussles and outbreaks, she had been removed, and allowed to finish her education in her own way among dogs and horses, country bumpkins and village gossips, growing up wild as a hawk and as wilful as a pixy.

Georgina passed athwart the village green, if that can be called a green where no grass grew. It was an open space, bounded on one side by the churchyard wall, on another by a picturesque range of almshouses, and in the centre stood the stage and stump of a granite cross. As she went along her

way she saw that a swarm of excited and hilarious youths was there congregated.

She had associated somewhat freely with the young folk at Wellcombe, and had learned to hold her own among them. She had taught the youths the limits of familiarity—touching on impertinence—beyond which they might not transgress.

To seem to shun them on this occasion would be a confession of dread and encouragement to insolence. She was shrewd, wary, and proud. Young and old in the place stood somewhat in awe of her, not on account of her position as niece of the vicar, but because of her strong and vigorous personality. They did not like her as not belonging to themselves. The mystery that surrounded her origin deepened and intensified the prejudice against her, for it was understood that were it true what was whispered concerning her, she could pretend to a position far above the heads of the yeomen of the moor.

Whether she arrogated to herself deference, or whether she did not, was immaterial. The mere fact that she had it in her power to make the claim was sufficient to provoke resentment. In the valley of Wellcombe but two classes received recognition, that of yeoman and that of labourer. Whoever did not enter into one or other category was treated as an intruder, to be put down firmly and, if possible, to be expelled.

The Prince of Wales, as Duke of Cornwall, owned the Forest of Dartmoor. The Wellcombe common-lands extended to the verge of the forest. The duchy claimed overlordship there also, and made intermittent attempts to establish the claim. But whenever the authorities of the duchy ventured upon the commons, they were met and hurled back by the lusty commoners of Wellcombe, armed with cudgels. Consequently the Prince of Wales was held to be the hereditary enemy of the land-holders of this parish, with whom they were ever at feud; and now it was rumoured that one closely related to him had been placed in their midst, perhaps to spy on and report their proceedings.

The villagers disliked the parson because he was not subject to them, and was a man of letters and of social standing.

The vicar who had preceded Mr. Thirkleby had been a man of piety, fervent in his charity, and zealous in the discharge of his sacred duties. But he had had the temerity to insist on certain elementary principles of morality, even of common decency, and as the yeomen and farmers of the district were devoid of scruples in such matters, they had resented his interference, and in a spirit of defiance had clubbed together to erect a meeting-house. The Reverend Josiah Thirkleby had succeeded a disappointed and broken-hearted man; he was at every point the reverse of his predecessor—callous as to his duties, indifferent as to the moral condition of his flock, incapable of understanding the sacred dignity of his calling.

Nevertheless, the schism continued. The farmers attending the chapel did not dissent from the doctrines preached in the parish church, for no doctrine of any kind was now preached there, but because they desired to have a minister under their control, and make him dance as they pulled the threads.

Moreover it continued on social grounds. Mr. Thirkleby was a gentleman, had been at court among lords and ladies, and must be shown that he was not to be allowed to assume lordly airs in Wellcombe. In speech, in mode of thought, in manner, he differed from his parishioners. In defect of the moral sense alone was he on their level. Where there is a common void there can be no collision; and, actually, none did occur between the vicar and his flock.

Over the commons the freeholders possessed or exerted rights to take from them turf and stone to any extent, and to turn out on them an unlimited number of sheep, cattle, and horses. They further insisted on enclosing and appropriating as private property so much waste land as each householder cared to wall about. But for the occasional opposition of the duchy, the Wellcombe yeoman in his valley and on the commons would have been an absolute king, above all laws, human and divine.

Georgie stood and hesitated for a moment whether she should hurry by, or stay her foot and inquire the occasion of the gathering. To pass unnoticed was impossible.

She resolved on facing the situation. There was, moreover,

a spice of curiosity in her. She was inquisitive to know what had brought the young fellows together.

Accordingly, without a symptom of shyness, she advanced towards the group, and saw that the blacksmith had deserted his anvil, and stood with folded arms looking on, in his apron; that several of the almswomen had issued from their cottages, and halted observant in their doorways. Coaker, a substantial yeoman, formed one of the group, as did the meagre parish-clerk and the rotund taverner.

Georgina quickly discerned that the assembly was gathered for sport. Some of the young fellows seeing her approach, with natural courtesy made room for her to pass to the inner circle, where she could see what was going forward. Then she discovered that a fox which had been trapped during the night was fastened by a collar and cord to a stake driven into the ground that it might be worried to death.

The lads had borrowed the skittle balls from the tavern, and were bowling at the frightened beast, that bounded and strained and dodged to escape the balls. Reynard was kept too much on the alert to have time to turn and gnaw at the string that restrained him.

His foot had been either struck in the game or nipped in the trap, so that he limped.

The boys took turns to throw at him. None so far had succeeded in bowling him over except one named Samson Furze, and his ball had not struck the fox, but the cord, and with the impact the poor brute had been thrown upon his back, eliciting a roar of laughter and claps of applause.

Georgie knew Samson well. She was two years his junior. She had met him in the hunting field, and at the village revels of Wellcombe and Holme.

Samson Furze prided himself on surpassing the rest of the youths in agility and strength. He was stoutly built, heavy browed, and was son of the wealthiest yeoman in the parish. He was conceited and overbearing. His conceit was fed by the adulation of a set of followers who expected to be treated with a glass of ale in return for their homage.

Samson expected of Georgina the same worship that was accorded him by all the young folk in the place. Among the

girls there was acute competition for his favour. She who should secure Samson secured, as well, the most coveted position in Wellcombe, an excellent farmhouse, land well stocked, and unlimited rights over the commons.

That the parson's niece should not be included among his admirers was inconceivable.

On one occasion, some years previously, he had challenged her to a race, and she had easily outstripped him.

"I am weighed down by my boots," was Samson's excuse for his defeat.

"A cart-horse should never run against a racer," retorted Georgie. "Big hoofs demand heavy shoes."

"We belong to different breeds, do we?" had been his exclamation, in a rage. At that time the rumour as to her parentage had not got about, or he might have retaliated with stinging effect.

He had never forgotten her words, and since the story of her origin had circulated he had brooded over it, and had excogitated the retort he might have made, and had desired an opportunity for delivering it.

The moment Furze saw Georgina he signed imperiously to her: "Come, try a cast at the fox against me."

"I will not do so," she replied.

"Girls never can bowl," contemptuously.

"I do not choose to take part in a game fit only to be the pastime of bullies. If the cord should snap you would all scatter as chaff, lest the fox should make his teeth meet in your calves. As with your namesake, your strength lies in the new cord."

She passed in rear of the bowlers and walked deliberately towards the churchyard wall, near to which the unfortunate brute was tethered. The lads assumed that she purposed passing through the wicket into the graveyard. By the wall a lad was stationed to return the balls that struck and rebounded.

When Georgie reached the gate, the last of the skittle balls had been delivered, and the boy was collecting them to roll them back to the players. Whilst he was thus engaged, she deliberately laid hold of the string by which Reynard was bound, and proceeded to gather it up.

"You fool!" shouted Samson. "He will bite, and his tooth is venomous."

"She need not fear," laughed another. "She is guarded with petticoats."

Regardless of shouts and objurgations levelled at her, Georgina continued to draw in the cord. The fox at the farther end, instead of turning to snap at her, strained to escape.

Samson ran forward, with an oath, and a face glowing with anger.

At that moment the urchin returned a ball, and Samson, not observing it, was tripped up and sprawled on the ground.

A burst of laughter saluted the accident.

Samson gathered himself up, fuming with rage and cursing, and rushed upon Georgie.

The girl turned her hand, and the fox snarled and showed his teeth and glared at his tormentors gathering in behind Samson.

All at once Georgie stooped, undid the buckle, and away flew the lads to right and left, one falling over the other, as the fox dashed among, between them, and flashed out of sight.

At the same moment a stinging blow from Samson's hand fell on Georgie's cheek, as he shouted, "Take that, you mongrel, from me!"

CHAPTER VI

A FIGURE OF FUN

WITH flaming cheek and furiously beating heart, a fire burning in her brain and scintillating at her eyes, Georgie ran to the cottage of Alse Grylls.

The day was bright, but in the cottage was a perpetual gloom. The valley was walled up to heaven with ridges of rock and moor, that cut away such slanting rays as might penetrate through door or window. Moreover, the hedge-row opposite the cottage rose as a mighty bank some eight feet and was crowned with trees. Further, the window was small and the panes dull, of bull's-eye glass.

The air without was crisp and pure; within it was charged with a fume of peat that hung perpetually about the cottage, not unpleasant, with an aromatic fragrance, and not pungent as the smoke from wood. It was a penetrating savour, and adhesive as well, clinging to whatever was cooked on the hearth and to all garments exposed to it.

Georgie rushed in like a whirlwind and stood on the stone paved floor, palpitating and breathless. She went before the old woman gesticulating with her hands, unable to speak.

Before the window was a kneading trough, in which was dough, and on the table a board and roller. Alse had been engaged in making the bread that was to last her for the week, and had desisted for a minute only to refresh herself with a pipe. She looked up at the excited and angry girl.

"You are early to-day," she said.

"He struck me; I wish him dead," gasped the girl.

"He—who is he? One who can strike my Georgie must be struck in turn."

"Look at this," said the girl, and turned her burning cheek towards her.

Though the cottage was dark, yet the old woman's eyes were accustomed to its twilight.

"I can see marks of a hand painted in red, the fingers of a big hand. It was not the parson, surely—he durst not do that."

Georgie burst forth. "Not he—Samson Furze! It was Samson Furze; and he used to me a slighting name."

The old woman nodded and rose.

She went to the kneading trough, and took forth the dough and cut from it portions on all sides, and laid these aside. Then she took the dough to the hearth, placed it on the hot stone and turned an iron pan over it. Next, she raked the hot embers together and heaped the glowing mass over the pan. That is how "kettle bread" is made.

She had seemed to pay no attention to Georgie and her grievance, but now she turned to her and said, "Samson Furze is his name."

She went to the board and collected the clippings and worked them up in her hand and kneaded them with deliberation into a lump.

Then she began to mould the dough into shape, and as she did so she muttered, "Hold not Thy tongue, O God of my praise, for the mouth of the deceitful is opened upon me."

She interrupted the psalm to say, "He is broad in the shoulders," and then went on, "They have spoken against me with false tongues; they compassed me about with words of hatred and fought against me without a cause."

Again she interrupted and said, "One part there is a little out," and resumed, "Set Thou an ungodly man to be ruler over him, and let Satan stand at his right hand. When sentence is given upon him let him be condemned, and let his prayer be turned into sin."

Angry, resentful though the girl was, yet a shiver ran through her as she heard these imprecations spoken by the

woman whilst she shaped out of the paste the figure of a man.

Samson Furze, unless his hands were occupied, was accustomed to assume a formal position with his left hand thrust into the band of his trousers, whilst he held the other before him to emphasise whatever he said. Alse had caught exactly his attitude.

"Fetch me my pin-cushion," said the old woman. "As I proceed with the psalm, at each pause thrust a pin or needle into the joints for rheumatism, into the head and heart for aches. Then I will set the figure by the fire and consume it with hot ashes for burning fever."

A stroke at the door. The old woman hastily threw a kerchief over the man of dough, and called to inquire who knocked. She received no reply, but, looking in the direction of the door that was ajar, saw Samson standing without, but without his hand thrust under his belt.

"It is Samson himself—we have drawn him hither. Already he feels uneasy and hurt," said Granny Grylls. "Go to him, Georgie."

"I have nought to say to him," replied the girl.

Again the young man rapped, and seeing Georgie made an awkward sign to her to come forth to him.

For reply she turned her back on the door, and faced the fire.

Then he came in, looking shy and uncomfortable, and nodded sideways to the old woman.

"It is the young lady from the parson's I would say a word with, granny," explained the youth. "If she forces me to say it out before you, that is her affair; but say it I will."

"Go to him," advised Alse. "He means no harm."

Georgina hesitated; her lips were set and her brows knitted. A hectic flame was in her cheek. She saw him cast a sidelong glance at the board, with the veiled figure, and she uttered a short laugh.

"No," said she, "I will not venture outside with you."

"You are afraid of me. I will not do it again."

"Afraid—afraid of you!" she laughed contemptuously.

"Come, come, Georgie," said he, in a soothing tone. "I

am sorry I did it, and I have brought you something—so as to make up the quarrel."

"I will receive nothing whatever from you on those terms."

He moved awkwardly from one foot to the other, and that which was slightly out-turned became at once conspicuous.

Georgie saw it—pointed to his foot, looked at Alse and laughed. This disconcerted him further.

"I am very sorry that I lost my temper," he said; "but you spoiled our sport."

"A sport suitable only for a set of bullies," said the girl.

"And I have always felt angry against you because of what you once said about me."

"About you? I did not know I had ever cast a thought to you, or troubled to speak of you."

"It was to me you said it."

"Indeed?" She shrugged her shoulders.

"And now I have brought you a little present."

"I will receive no present from you. You strike me, as though I were a dog, and then cast a bone to me and say, 'Be friends.'"

"You have not seen what I have got."

"I do not ask to see it."

"Georgie! One day I was on Rowdon. There is a great barrow there made up of loose stones. I had nothing at the time to occupy me, so I amused myself with pulling away the stones and working inwards to the centre. Then I came on a sort of chest made of upright stones, and in that were bones and ashes and some cloam, and I pulled out this thing also." He held out a finely worked spiral bronze armlet.

"You rob the dead!"

"I found it. It is yours. All along I have kept it for you. I have not shown it to anyone. I told no one, not even my mother, that I had found it. When I drew it out I said at once that it should be for you. It is yours. I have kept it ever since last May for you, but somehow I never had the courage to offer it to you."

"I will not have it."

"Then I shall throw it away."

"Throw it away, then."

He stood irresolute. Georgie put her hands behind her back to let him see that she was firm in her determination. "I will not touch the trash."

"Georgie, it is not trash. When burnished it shines like gold, and the zigzag work on it is beautiful."

"I will not have it."

With an oath he went to the door and flung the bracelet over the hedge on the farther side of the lane.

"And now," said the girl, "I will tell you why you have come here, and why you offered me that piece of worthless metal."

"It is not worthless."

"I care not. Why did you follow me?"

"Because I knew I had done wrong, and I desired to make amends."

"Not so. You followed because you were afraid. You thought I had taken refuge with Alse Grylls for the purpose of ill-wishing you, and you quaked in your shoes, and felt at once the preliminary pains shoot through you. Was it not so?"

She looked at him level in the face. He lost colour and dropped his eyes. "I know it," she pursued. "You followed, not because you were sorry for having hurt me"—

"You do me wrong, Georgie, indeed you do."

"Hear me out—not because you desired my forgiveness, and would buy it with so much bell-metal."

"Then give it me freely."

"No," continued the girl. "You sneaked here, in fear lest"—

She suddenly snatched the kerchief from the figure and exposed it.

Granny Grylls started forward to prevent her, but was too late.

"Look," said Georgie in jeering tones, "look at this! I called you a cart-horse once. Here you are—a thoroughbred. Observe the position of the hand; look at the splay foot. On my life, it is done to perfection! A figure of fun! An incomparable figure of fun, only inferior in absurdity to the original!"

The lad winced, and his colour changed rapidly. Hanging his head he said, "You have a rough tongue."

"And you a heavy hand. You see, you were not wrong in hastening after me. Not one moment too soon have you arrived. I have already this shawl-pin in my hand wherewith to send an ache into your heart."

"You have done that already," said the lad, in a low tone.

"And in half an hour you would have been in a raging fever."

"Are you not afraid to do such evil work?"

"Oh no; we are out of the days when witches were burnt—and I am not so certain that the work is evil. How are we weak women to defend ourselves against the violent and the overbearing unless we have recourse to powers above us?—and we were but reciting a psalm of David. But there"—with a stroke of the hand Georgie dashed down the dough figure, and then with both hands kneaded it up. "There," she said, "fear that no more. A figure of fun such as you is not to be taken seriously."

He walked, crestfallen, disconcerted, to the door. Never before had this haughty, flattered, and self-conscious youth been brought to such a condition. At the door he stood with one hand on the latch, looking out, across the lane, yet irresolute. The girl watched him, with a contemptuous curl of the lip. He played with the latch, he put a finger under it and raised, then let it fall.

"Are you going?" asked she, "or do your knees give way under you at the thought of that from which you have escaped?"

Then he turned half about, and said, "Georgie, do not ill-wish me, and I swear to you that I will let no other chap lift a hand against you from this day forward."

"Samson," retorted the girl, "it was not a blow only you gave me."

"I know—I said something. Georgie, tell me honestly that is not true what folks say concerning you—I mean, who you are—and I swear I will believe you, and I will pound to a jelly anyone who dares hint that you are not of as honest parentage as I am. I may be but a yeoman, but"—

"Leave this," said Georgie, with her heart in her mouth. "I will answer no questions of your asking."

He went slowly away. She stood looking through the door, watching him depart. Then she turned, stamped angrily on the floor and said, "I will know who were my father and mother."

CHAPTER VII

BEGINNING TO LIVE

SAMSON FURZE was not gone five minutes before the young maid from the Manor House came in breathless, brusquely, and gasped, "Miss Georgie! do please to come. The master ba'n't himself. There's Rebecca and Moses can't do nothing wi' him. He ain't eat no breakfast, and do look that queer as makes you feel frightened. He won't lie in bed nor send for the doctor, and he can't dress himself."

Georgie at once went with the girl, and walked fast. On reaching the house, she saw the housekeeper at the door.

"Oh, miss!" said she. "It was lucky, Doctor Furlong were passin' by and I just called him in and axed he to go up, as a caller like, and look at the master. Moses has helped to dress him. But he is in a queer state, sure enough."

A moment after the medical man came down. He shook his head.

"He will not let me look at his tongue, nor feel his pulse. He will answer no question," said he. "We must humour him. There is not much can be done. Get him to bed if you can."

"What is the matter with my uncle?" asked the girl.

"My dear," answered Mr. Furlong, "I can answer that better later, if he will suffer me to see him."

And without saying more he left the house.

Georgie now ascended the stairs and entered her uncle's chamber.

A fire had been lighted in the grate, and Parson Thirkleby was seated by it in an arm-chair. At once Georgina perceived

a marked alteration in his appearance. His face was deadly white, with a greenish hue about the mouth, and the features were drawn. If what had befallen him was paralysis, it had not lamed his tongue, for he could speak, though not with ease, and it had affected his temper. She found him in a condition of great irritability.

"It is nonsense," he said. "What does Rebecca mean by sending up Furlong. I am not ill. I never felt better in my life. A little off in my appetite, on account of indiscretion at supper—roast goose, ate too much. I am going downstairs. I will not be mewed up in my bedroom, like an invalid. I am feeling uncommonly well."

"Oh, uncle," said Georgie, shocked at his appearance, "you positively must remain here. I purpose having the parlour and dining-room chimneys swept, and we must cover the carpet and the furniture with papers."

"You should have told me of this overnight. Then I would have arranged to go to one of my friends. I will go now. Order my horse. I intend to ride. All that I require to set me up is fresh air."

"Uncle, the doctor says you must go to bed."

"Doctor! Doctor! Oh yes, that he may physic and charge. I know the ways of these gentry. They run you down in order that they may wind you up."

"But you are looking very ill."

"Your eye is jaundiced. I am jolly, very, very jolly—never felt better in my life."

"But, uncle, your face—your appearance."

"I took too much wine last night."

"Your hand trembles."

"It is firm and strong as iron. This comes of Rebecca's talk. She fancies I am ill. It is nothing. Send her about her business. I hate having whimsical old women about me."

"But, uncle, she is a faithful servant."

"I do not call that fidelity, I call it gross, unwarranted impertinence,—sending up a doctor, a wretched, ignorant country practitioner, to see me, when I had told Rebecca and Moses that I was perfectly well, sound as a bell, only a little off my feed, having eaten and drunk too much last night. Old

servants presume, and when they do that it is high time to be rid of them. Take that away," he thrust with his elbow against a book on the little table at his side. "That is part of her insolence. Because I am somewhat dyspeptic she has put a Bible under my nose. What do I want with a Bible? I have enough of that on Sundays. It looks bad—bad as a medicine phial or a bowl of slops. It gives to the air a smack of the sickroom. Take it away and bring me *Roderick Random*."

Georgie removed the volume, the presence of which was an offence to her uncle, and after a little search found the book that he required as a substitute.

But his hand shook, and he was not able to hold it.

"This comes of my port," said he; "very fine old stuff, but one may take too much even of a good thing."

"Shall I read to you, uncle?" asked the girl, noticing his incapacity to hold a book steadily.

"What? *Roderick Random*? No, no—too philosophical for a girl. I will not split your brain with metaphysical disquisitions."

Georgie noticed that he laboured at his words and found a difficulty in articulating them distinctly. The letter S gave him special difficulty. Then Rebecca mounted the stairs, and throwing open the door said shortly, "Sir Thomas is below. I suppose, as you dismissed the doctor, you will not see him."

"I will step down to him at once," said the parson, and made an attempt to rise in his chair, but tottered. The girl at once offered her assistance, which he impatiently rejected.

"Ah! the chimney—I forgot—the chimney has to be swept. I cannot receive him in the parlour, it is strewed and muffled in brown paper and scraps of news. Show him up. He will excuse that he is received here. His chimneys have to be swept, I suppose, sometimes. All people's chimneys have to be swept."

"And some folks' consciences as well," said Rebecca, "only they never get it."

"What is that you are muttering?" cried the Reverend Josiah, turning round. "Take care, Rebecca; you allow that tongue of yours over-much licence. Show up Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt."

In two minutes the knight was in the room. He carried an Oriental porcelain bowl in his hands.

"Here, Thirkleby," said the warden. "I promised your ward I would make you a present in place of your junket bowl that went to pieces last night, and I have come over the moor expressly to redeem my promise. A word passed to a young lady should never be allowed to lie unfulfilled," he bowed to Georgie.

"I thank you. How are you to-day, Tyrwhitt? For my part, the goose, or the port, or the goose and port in combination, have played the devil with my digestion, and I am dyspeptic this morning. Odds life! That is nothing. Moses tells me that Hullett has not lifted his head from his pillow. Davey got adrift on his way home last night, and had to sleep in a tallat, among the hay, and has been bitten by fleas damnably. I have come off the best of the three. And you? Is your hand shaking?"

"Not a bit, vicar. See how steadily I can hold the bowl."

"Let me look at it."

He held out a quivering hand, but, observing how feeble and uncertain it was, hastily drew it back.

"Set down the bowl. I thank you. It is prodigious fine. It will be an ornament to my table, and may we drink many a bout of punch out of it. I'm vexed, 'pon my soul, to receive you in my bedroom, but chimney-cleaning is what we must all go through; and being just off my gloss this morning, it is as well. After a drinking bout, I am usually so. Here is Georgie—offered to read to me *Roderick Random*!"

He laughed, and held the arms of his chair as he did so.

Sir Thomas stood by the chimney breast, his right elbow on the mantelshelf and one finger to his temple, the other folded against his chin. With the left hand, and with a glance of the eye, he signed Georgie to withdraw. The girl left the room, and shut the door behind her.

The warden did not speak for some minutes; his eyes were fixed with intensity on the Vicar of Wellcombe.

Josiah took notice of this, and resented it.

"Am I a curiosity from beyond the sea, Tyrwhitt, that you study me so closely?"

"Thirkleby," said the knight, "I met Furlong as I came along, and had some conversation with him."

"The officious ass!" said the vicar irritably. "Conceive his insolence! He dared to intrude upon me, because that impertinent old toad, Rebecca, said my liver was out of order. I refused to have any medicine he might send, and I will not pay his bill. If he sends one in, I shall deduct the amount from Rebecca's wage."

"My dear fellow," said Sir Thomas, "do not deceive yourself, you are ill; more ill than you choose to allow. Have you made your will?"

"Will! My will!" almost screamed the vicar. "No occasion for that as yet. I am just about to enjoy life—have a roaring time of it on the fifteen thousand pounds—that is my price. Curse me! I said yesterday ten thousand. But I am like the sibyl—I increase my price as the time speeds on. Will, indeed! And pray—have you made yours?"

"Long ago."

"Right! You are older and less robust than myself."

"What did Dr. Furlong say to you?"

"I would not listen to a word from him. I ordered him out of the room. Confound his impudence, intruding on me uncalled!"

"I had a talk with him. He cannot do much for you, Thirkleby."

"I know that. I shall be right as a trivet in a couple of hours, if not harassed unendurably."

"Thirkleby," said the knight gravely, "you must hear the truth from me. You have had a stroke. It is a premonition of an approaching end. I do not say that this will come speedily. God forbid! But it is an infallible note of warning to you to set your house in order."

The vicar looked at Sir Thomas for some moments in speechless confusion of mind, partly through fear, partly through rage. He spluttered forth a few words, but they were unintelligible.

"Thirkleby! A man such as you are, with common sense and courage, knows what to do on such an occasion as this. I speak to you as a friend, in all sincerity and affection. It is

few that are cut off by the scythe of death with such suddenness that they can make no provision for it. With most the shadow of the scythe comes first—a little point, then a broad band—and it is a merciful dispensation that it is so. The dark point is touching you now. Be a man and make ready. Look into your temporal affairs and wind them up."

"It is not so! It shall not be so!" burst forth from the Reverend Josiah. "Shadow! Curse me, I see none. I tell you I am just about to step out of it. Shadow! Pinched between these gloomy hills all these hateful years—I have been in shadow, lived as under a cloud. But this is the end of it. I am going to Paris."

"Thirkleby, it is no pleasure to me to speak plain and unpleasant words. I would leave you in your delusion were it not that you have charge of a young girl, and have responsibilities connected with her. You must provide for her future. You know what arrangements were made with you about her."

"Bah! I have years before me."

"And," said Sir Thomas, "there is that manuscript. It must be destroyed."

"By heaven! Now I know what you are after. Now I understand your little game, frightening, or trying to frighten, me into the belief that I am ill. Never felt better in my life! No, no, my man! I am going to Paris. I shall see there to its being printed, and in three months—unless I get my fifteen thousand pounds—England will have something to talk about."

In his excitement, Mr. Thirkleby attempted to rise from his chair, but, unable to maintain himself on his legs, he stumbled and fell on his knees by the fender.

Sir Thomas did not hold out a finger to assist him. He looked down on him with observant eyes and knitted brows.

The vicar, annoyed at this exhibition of his infirmity, laid hold of the tongs, pretending that he was picking up some fallen turfs; but he could not manage the tongs, they shook and fell apart in his hand.

He brandished them, and thrust towards the knight, who remained immovable.

"Tyrwhitt, I tell you, I am going to Paris. I am going to

have my fling there, after this intolerable exile among barren hills and lubberly rustics. My blood is young and lusty. I shall be a buck again, a roaring devil like Tom and Jerry in the pictures. I am about"—he flourished the tongs—"I am about now to begin to live—the only life worth living—on fifteen thousand pounds. Hurrah, for a free and jolly life!"

CHAPTER VIII

THE KEY

WHEN Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt had left the room and descended the stairs, he signed to Georgina, and she followed him into the parlour, where already some preparations had been made for chimney-sweeping.

"We did not really intend to have the chimney done to-day," said the girl, "but uncle was so determined to descend, and seemed so unfit for it, that I made this expedient an excuse to keep him to his room. I have sent for the mason, and with a rope and a bundle of holly we shall get at least one chimney cleaned to-day, and so save my conscience. I cannot tell a lie, and if uncle were to come down to-morrow and find that he had been deceived, he would make it unpleasant for Rebecca and me."

"He will not leave his room for some days," said the Warden of the Stannaries; "he has no notion how ill he really is, and he will not allow that anything serious is the matter with him. He was rude to Dr. Furlong, he insulted him. Dr. Furlong did not allow you to know that, but I met him in the road, and he told me everything. Your uncle's heart is in a state of collapse, and he has had a slight seizure. Of course, none of us can tell how long it will be before he gets a second. From a third there will be no recovery, and probably a second will leave him speechless, and in all likelihood will affect his brain. Furlong is very reasonably embarrassed. He cannot force himself on a man who does not want him; and his feelings have been hurt—for, not to put too fine a point on it, the vicar was rude to him. However, do not

scruple to send for him should matters take a turn for the worse. My own impression is, that it will not be long before there ensues a second stroke. Furlong thinks so as well. Now what is to be done? He must be kept quiet and not excited—so the doctor says. On the other hand, he has not made any provision for serious eventualities, and he must be urged to this. I have done what I could; I have spoken plainly, and have failed. If he is fond of you, and you use your persuasion, you may succeed."

"I really do not know whether he cares for me a rush."

"No one can see you and not love you," said Sir Thomas, with a bow.

"Unless he sees too much of me, and too close," remarked Georgie.

"If you are his niece"—

"If. That is just it."

The knight stood somewhat embarrassed. But presently he said, "Of course, Miss Thirkleby, we have assumed this relationship; anyhow, you are nearer akin to him than any other person we know about, and no one else has been here in all the years of what he calls his exile to claim kinship. We will take it as beyond dispute that you are what you call yourself, his niece. He has never been explicit to me, and, I suppose, he has not been definite to you. You stand near him, and must use such gentle urgency as you can to induce him to provide for you after such an eventuality as his being taken away from the exercise of his present guardianship over you. It is very important. I beseech you to consider what I say, and act upon it."

Then the old gentleman left.

Georgie remained some time in the parlour considering what she had heard.

She did not really love her uncle. He had done nothing to attach her to him, had shown her but little consideration and no affection. Of late he had suffered a certain impatience at her presence to transpire in his conduct, looks, and words. But she was young, had a naturally good heart, and she was troubled and pained by the tidings she had received, and alarmed at the seriousness with which Sir Thomas had

spoken to her of her uncle's condition. What was she to do? She was to keep her uncle as quiet as might be, and, at the same time, to insist on the most disquieting of topics.

She walked across the room, stepping on the pieces of brown paper strewn on the carpet, as though striding from one ice block to another, floating in a stream just free from its winter encasement. Then she stooped and began to collect the papers that had been spread. It was of no avail having the chimney swept if her uncle was not likely to come downstairs. And next moment, such was her irresolution, she spread them again. She had said that the chimney was to be swept. She had sent for the mason, and he would arrive in the black suit he assumed for the purpose, and her uncle would be annoyed unless he heard the grating, sawing sound of the rope in the chimney, dragging the holly-bush up and down. He would expect that, and be angry and fly out unless he heard it.

Then she considered about herself. Was she the niece of the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby or not? And who actually was her father? Should her uncle fall a victim to a second stroke and lose the power of speech, then her chance of knowing the truth might be gone for ever. She could not resolve whether Sir Thomas knew the facts relating to her origin or not. He seemed to her to possess a knowledge which he endeavoured to disguise.

If—as he said was probable—Mr. Thirkleby were taken away suddenly, to whom should she go? On what could she live? Brought up in the wilds of Dartmoor, she was ignorant of the world. Independence of some sort she did possess. She could hold insolent men and unruly boys at arm's length; she could ride—but this was the limit of her accomplishments. There was a kindliness and courtesy about Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt that gave her confidence. He would not desert her in an emergency. But Georgie desired, if so it might be, to be independent of everyone.

Further hesitation was put a stop to by loud raps on the floor, produced by her uncle employing the tongs for the purpose.

Georgie went to him at once.

"Am I to be left all day alone, and to be neglected?" asked

the vicar querulously. "I want a cup of strong coffee. Bid Rebecca prepare it immediately."

When this order had been transmitted, he signed to a stool. "Sit there. Am I plague-stricken, that everyone flies from me? If I want anything I cannot ring, for the crank is bent and the wire is broken."

It was not so. Georgie knew that her uncle unassisted could not reach the bell-rope, but would not admit it. She drew the stool to the fireside and seated herself upon it. Presently Rebecca appeared with the coffee, and set it on the table beside her master.

Georgie noticed that the vicar was incapable of holding the cup steadily, and yet would resent the offer of assistance. She looked accordingly into the fire, and pretended not to observe the shifts he made to drink his coffee without upsetting the contents of the cup over his shirt-front and knees.

When the clickering of the cup and saucer had ceased, she turned herself about and saw that the saucer was nearly full of coffee that had been spilt.

The vicar extended his legs, rested his feet on the fender and folded his hands, with his elbows reposing on the arms of the chair.

He lapsed into a brown study, and Georgie refrained from disturbing him. She had much to occupy her mind. She was resolved on making an attempt to elicit from him some information relative to herself, but how best to do so was not clear. Her uncle was in a testy humour.

Presently he laughed and said, but speaking to himself and not to her, "The wish, Thomas, was father to the thought. You quote Shakespeare, so can I."

She said nothing, but continued gazing into the peat fire.

"I can understand it. You, and His Majesty behind you, would rejoice to have me out of the way, to hear the earth fall on my coffin. Then—then you would be satisfied that all danger of the truth coming out would be at an end. Ha! ha! There is life in the old dog yet. I am not to be hustled out of the way to suit your convenience. The servant is worthy of his hire. I have been faithful, but I will not be imposed upon, nor suffer myself to be thrust out of the

way. I have Amalthea's letters, those received by her. I have signatures that cannot be disputed to a contract that has never been carried out." Then he fell to chuckling; and, pressing too heavily on the fender, upset it with the fire-irons.

"Uncle," said Georgie, as she replaced what had been overthrown, "I would hear something about that same Amalthea."

He started, and looked at her with astonished eyes.

"I have been half dreaming," he muttered, "and have talked nonsense. What know you of any Amalthea?"

"I found a silk bag in a work-table drawer, within it papers of embroidered silks and a pretty needle packet of perforated card, and on that was worked the name of Amalthea. You have this moment uttered the same name. Was she your sister?"

"There was nothing else in the bag?"

"Nothing but faded silks cut to lengths, and a scrap of unfinished embroidery."

"Ah!" said the vicar, with a sigh of relief.

"Uncle! Was Amalthea any relation to me?"

He did not answer, but fixed his eyes on her, at first intently, as though putting to himself a question whether he should reply. But then his eyes became dazed and his look abstracted.

Georgie waited patiently for a while, and then she said, "I am sure that Amalthea was my mother."

"Who has been talking to you about these matters? Someone has set you on. Sir Thomas? I know it was he. What has he told you?"

"He has told me nothing, uncle; he conceived, and justly, that it was your place, and not his, to inform me about myself and my mother."

"He did not set you to worm things out of me?"

"No, indeed, uncle."

"Nor to endeavour to get possession of a certain budget of papers?"

"Most assuredly not."

"He is a shrewd man, is Sir Thomas, and in the pay and employ of someone very high up—high as the moon and more

full of blots. It is to the interest of Sir Thomas to get these papers into his power. It is to yours and mine that he should not have the fingering of them. By Cynthia's bow! it behoves us to act warily and be prepared against his devices."

"Uncle," said Georgina, rising from the stool, "I am no longer a child. I am nearly a woman, full blown. It is unjust to leave me in the dark as to who I am, and what my parents were. It is unjust in you, it is unendurable to me. You do not know of the annoyances, the impertinences to which I am exposed. But—though—I am wrong. You do know them in a measure. You heard how I was saluted last night by your boon companions as the Blood Royal and Royal Georgie. What was the meaning of that salutation? It took place under your roof, at your table, unreproved by you. Why did you suffer it? Why did you not knock down those tipsy men who thus addressed me? I demand an explanation. Can you not see that I am justified in insisting upon an answer?"

She paused, standing over him. There was a mixture of imperiousness and of its contrary, supplication, in her tone, or rather, it oscillated between both.

"That is not all. This morning I have been grossly insulted in public. Samson Furze cast at me a word that implied that I did not come of honest parentage. He regretted it, followed me and professed his readiness to retract it, if the word were unjustly applied. What could I say? I have a right to the information I now demand."

"You are pertinacious."

"After what took place last night, I should be a coward if I failed to be pertinacious."

"They went too far last night."

"It was you, sir, who went too far. You permitted that to pass at your table unreproved which you should have peremptorily stopped, had you respected me. Because you suffered it, I demand the knowledge of who I am, as a reparation."

Then she seated herself, not on the stool, but on a chair over against him, with her lips set and her hands clenched on her knees.

"YOU WILL FIND A SMALL KEY ATTACHED TO THE STRAP OF MY LEFT LEG

"I am ready to receive your communication, and I sit here till it is made."

For a while the Reverend Josiah remained irresolute, his fleshy lips worked. Presently he said—

"Georgie, the goose and the port wine have affected me strangely. Will you kneel and unloose my garter? You will find a small key attached to the strap of my left leg. I cannot unbuckle it myself to-day."

The girl at once stooped and did as required.

Fastened to the garter, as said, was a small key.

"There is a chest under my bed," he pursued. "This is the key to it. Open the chest. Within is an iron despatch box, with a letter padlock. Bring it to me."

Again she did as requested, and produced the box of metal and ebony.

He endeavoured to turn the rings of the lock, but his fingers refused to act. He made many futile attempts, and at last, with an exclamation of impatience, abandoned the task. "F A R O," said he. "That is the word. I shall alter it to-morrow. Make Faro of the letters, and it will unlock."

The girl arranged the letters as requested, and the padlock fell apart. She opened the case.

The vicar put his tremulous hand in, and drew forth a package. "There is here," said he, "much of my writing. See—on this parchment is inscribed 'Revelations of a Man about Court.' In this budget is contained everything that concerns your birth and the condition of your parents. Everything is there—a full statement, with corroborative papers, autographs. Now put it back again. Fasten the lock, replace the case. Lock the chest. Swear to me on the book—kiss it—no, that is *Roderick Random*—that other book, where is it? Swear to me, should anything chance to me, not to give up this package to Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, or to anyone commissioned by him, or to anyone whom you may suspect to come from him. Do not let that bundle of documents pass into his or other hands, till you have been paid down the sum of thirteen thousand pounds. Take the book and swear."

He obliged Georgie to repeat the words after him, and press her lips to the Bible.

"Should anything unexpected befall me, they will leave no stone unturned in their efforts to secure that brown paper-covered parcel. Use your mother-wit to circumvent them. But, bah! The old dog is not dead yet, nor his teeth worn down that he cannot bite."

Georgina stood by him, holding the key.

"I am sorry to trouble you," he said, "but my hand shakes to-day. That confounded goose sits on my chest. Fasten the key again to my garter."

"But you have told me nothing."

"Nothing! I have told you everything that I can dare tell now. Let none get hold of that key, Georgie. It is the key to your past history, and the key to your future."

CHAPTER IX

AN OFFER

IN the afternoon Georgie escaped from the house to take her walk on the moors and fill her lungs with the invigorating air for which she had pined. Her evening ramble would naturally be up the rising wave of rock and heather that broke into a foam of granite tors on the east, for this was the side of the valley that would then, in winter, enjoy sunshine, when all was shadow on the western side, as also, because from the massive piles of crag at the summit the eye could range to the horizon, over a tumbled sea of hills to the golden horizon, when the sun set after its brief course.

The Manor House lay under the mighty ridge of Rowdon, that stood up as a wall seventeen hundred feet to the west, and made the afternoon but brief. Another two hours of day might be won by mounting the opposed ridge of moor that broke into crags, forming a series of tors.

The ascent was rapid and rough; but this was enjoyable. It made the girl's pulses throb fast, and brought a tingle of coursing blood into her cheeks and temples.

When she reached the summit, she planted herself among the rocks.

The evening was fine. Clouds, indeed, hung about the declining sun, but they were not of lead; they had been transmuted to gold. The whole south-west was suffused with amber light, and against the sky the ranges of moor stood up as waves on a stormy sea. Between them was already gathering a delicate haze that in an hour would curdle into fog.

With bounding pulses and heaving bosom she sat and

looked away to where the last golden spark of the sun was disappearing.

Far below, in cold, death-like shadow, was the Manor House, where she had spent so many years—joyless when in that house, bright only when out of it, rambling unrestrained over the heather and through the aromatic gorse.

It is often said that moorland is dull and uninteresting in winter. Such is the opinion of those unacquainted with it. The smell and chill of death is perceived in woodland regions. There the strewn decaying foliage, the bare branches, the deep mire, proclaim that life is over and the winter death is triumphant. But on the moors there are no signs of mortality. It is true that the heather is not in flower and that the fern has turned to russet, but this serves to enhance the glory of colour that pervades the upland. The shadows of the rain-clouds produce belts of indigo, alternating with gleams of sulphur yellow. Never are the contrasts finer; never is there absence of the earnest of life, for the furze will bloom throughout the winter, and is always of the richest sage-green. The savour and damps of mortality reach not so high. The moor is eternally young.

As Georgie sat looking into the flaming west it was to her as though she were transported to that gilded chamber to which, as a child, she had been conducted; perhaps the glitter in the clouds recalled an early reminiscence of flashes of sun in a chandelier, or on ormolu furniture—but in a moment she ceased to see what was before her, and was living in a retrospect.

Again she saw the fat gentleman with his hair curled on the top of his head and the protruding white muffler or cravat; and saw him eye her through a gold-edged glass—and fall to a titter, and pass a remark, unintelligible to her, into the ear of a companion.

Again she recalled how her heart had swelled at the thought that she was being laughed at; how her tears had broken forth, and a sob had escaped her breast—and how the short man had said, "Remove this child. I detest squalling brats."

Georgina knew what was rumoured concerning her. At

first, when reports had begun to circulate, she had paid them no attention. But she found that when she went to the market town, she was observed; that she was pointed out to strangers, and that whispered remarks were passed in reference to her. She had caught allusions that could not be misunderstood. Then she had come to muse over what was said concerning her, and to rhyme them with reminiscences of her childhood and with the conduct of her guardian.

Her heart was troubled with conflicting emotions, her brain bewildered with contradictory ideas.

Much as her ardent, affectionate nature yearned for the love of a father, she could not endure the thought that he was her parent whom she had seen that once in the gilded room. She had possessed a child's conception of the majesty of royalty—built up of imaginations of King Arthur holding court at Caerleon, and Solomon in all his glory at Jerusalem, and Charlemagne at the head of his peers. That puffed, flabby, commonplace personage she had heard addressed as "Your Royal Highness,"—then a prince regent, and now a king! Why, a sturdy moorman, florid with facing the winds, and with a voice like a trumpet, was more of a man than he.

She had greedily read the journals that came to her uncle. She knew what was the estimate in which the then reigning sovereign was held. The determination of George IV. to divorce his wife, the refusal to Queen Caroline of admission to Westminster Abbey on the occasion of the coronation,—all this had stirred up popular feeling, not in London only, but throughout England, even in such a remote backwater of life as Wellcombe. The conduct, the moral character of the king, had been freely handled. Mr. Thirkleby had not been sparing of his sneers and anecdotes at the cost of the prince, who now wore the crown; embittered by neglect, resentful against him who had, as he conceived, thrust him aside, he had allowed his tongue free play, even before his ward or niece, whichever she was.

She had come simultaneously to regard the king as the most contemptible of men at the time that she was arriving at

the conviction that he was her father. If, on one hand, she was flattered with the thought that she had such an illustrious origin, on the other was much to weigh her down—the suspicion that her mother's good name had suffered, and the knowledge that if George IV. were her father, he was not one for whom she could personally entertain respect or affection.

And what about her mother? Of her she knew nothing. Was she a cruelly wronged woman? Georgina could hardly suppose that it was otherwise, and if so, then she must feel resentment against the man who had done her an injury. That poor mother! In the ignorance in which Georgie was as to her story—with nothing of her left save an embroidered name, "Amalthea," and slips of coloured silk in a bag!—what possibilities for the exercise of the imagination, for the conjuring up of a history full of disappointment, blight, desertion, and death. Frequently had she looked at the name on the perforated card, and wondered whether it were that of her mother; but now, after what had passed between her uncle and herself, vague though it had been, small doubt remained that she was the daughter of this same Amalthea.

Her origin could not have been creditable, or so much reserve would not have been maintained concerning it. There were noble families that descended from Charles II. bearing the bar-sinister. But Charles, if not a reputable personage, was at all events a picturesque king, whereas George IV. was disreputable and ridiculous.

Georgie rose to descend.

The day was at an end. Darkness was gathering in. Below, in the valley, it was already night, and lights twinkled in the village.

She had become hot through climbing. It was the sense of chilliness rather than perception of the coming on of night that roused the girl to leave her seat among the rocks.

As she left the crags, she saw someone moving towards her, and in a minute was aware that this person was Samson Furze.

She said nothing. She was ill pleased to see him again.

"I thought you might require help in the dusk," he said.

"How long have you entertained that thought?" she asked shortly.

"I saw you on the rock, and I knew that it would fall dark before you could reach home."

"I am usually able to find my way about unassisted."

"Miss Georgie, they are saying below that the parson is ill."

"Oh! you have the courtesy now to address me as Miss."

"Is he very ill?"

"My uncle is really ill, and very ill. Did you come up the tor to ask this question? You might have had the latest news by inquiring at the door."

"I heard some talk that he would not let the doctor look at him."

"Really you seem to be so well informed concerning my uncle, that it was giving yourself unnecessary trouble to climb the hill to ask further news."

"It was not that."

"Then what was it?"

"I was thinking about you."

"There was really no occasion for that."

"Yes, Georgie—I mean Miss Georgie. If anything were to happen to the parson—I mean if he were to die."

"Then the bishop would send you another."

"I do not mean that."

"I cannot fathom your meaning. Is it like Classenwell Pool—without a bottom?"

"What would become of you if he were to die?"

"He is not dead."

"No; but"—

"But this is just one thing out of many that it does not concern you to know, and that you have no right to ask."

"It does concern me very closely."

"As how?"

"I have been worrying ever since I heard talk of the parson's illness. Folk say he has had a bad heart for a long time, and then on top of that he had had a stroke. When I heard of that it worked and fretted in me to know what would happen to you. Have you any other relations? None have

been here to see you. Would you have to go away? You have no other home. Will you have anything to live upon? Who can say? This has been fretting me, and if that is not concern tell me what is?"

"It is very good of you to worry about a mongrel like me"—

"Miss Georgie!"

"You called me that."

"And if I did—one who has no known father and mother is just one who has no home and no belongings. Look here, Miss Georgie. I'm not a king's son, but I have had honest parents, and I'm one that might be a parliament man, as I've land as brings me in the proper qualification. Now look here!"

"How can I look in the dark? I look, but see nothing."

"Do not trifle with me. I mean honestly. I've known you since we were little boy and girl together—and I've always, somehow, set my mind on you."

"And bullied me."

"I have not let anyone else touch you."

"How gracious!"

"And—I mean it civilly and kindly and honourably, Miss Georgie—if the worst should happen, and you find yourself without a home and without a friend, and without kin—then, here am I. I will give you all. I am but a yeoman, but I am honest. I will make you my wife, and not one in Wellcombe will dare say a word against you."

"And even if things came to the worst, I would not have you," said the girl. "And I consider it a piece of impertinence your making me such a proposal."

"If things turn out well for you; if the king—God bless His Majesty—please to say, This is the blood royal! This is my daughter, and I am proud to claim her—then, miss, I will not say a word. I'll do no more than make so bold as to offer you a bunch of heather when you drive away in the king's coach. But if he say, It is false; I know her not, I never heard of her, I am not responsible for her, I will give her nothing; and if"—

"Have done with your 'ifs.'"

"All these things are possible. If things turn out this way —then, perhaps, you may give a thought to Samson Furze and his pleasant farmhouse."

"Never," said Georgie angrily; "come what may, you have my answer. Never."

CHAPTER X

GOING! GOING!

MR. HULLETT, his pasty-hued broad face under a cap with lappets that covered the ears and a peak that was turned up, was riding along a lane, when from a sideway Mr. Davey came upon him, also mounted, his face purple in the raw air.

"Going my way?" asked Hullett.

"Depends which is your way," replied Davey.

"My way! I am about to call and inquire at the Manor House."

"So am I."

"By all reports, a bad case."

"I hope not too bad—I want to see Parson Thirkleby."

"So do I."

"On business?"

"Yes, and you?"

"On business also."

"If I might make so bold as to ask, if yours is important?"

"Eminently so."

"Mine also. I hope he is well enough to see us both."

"I hope he will be well enough to see me."

"And me."

They rode on in silence, the one with a face like a white full moon, the other with one red as the sun in a November fog.

Each occasionally looked askance at the other.

"Your business is private?" asked Hullett.

"Yes, decidedly so."

"And so is mine. Suppose he can see but one of us?"

"Then only one of us can transact business with him to-day."

"That will be awkward."

"Vastly so for the one who does not see him."

"My business is of supreme importance," said Hullett. "In fact, I may say that my future greatly depends on it. Under the circumstances, as a friend, I am sure I can count on you to give me the precedence."

"I would do so with the utmost pleasure, but, unhappily, my business with him is also urgent, and affects me most materially."

"The fact is," said Hullett, with a sigh, "I have been most confoundedly bubbled over my take of Stannon."

"And so have I over my mining lease."

"And I thought that by means of Thirkleby I might obtain some redress."

"Exactly my view of my own case," said Davey.

"By heaven! you don't mean—that is—in the way of a transaction?"

"In the way of a transaction; you have hit it."

Again they rode on, side by side, in silence.

After some minutes, Hullett opened conversation again.

"By transaction, you mean"—

"Exactly, a transaction."

Hullett moved uneasily in his saddle.

"I am afraid," said he, after clearing his throat, "I am vastly afraid that we have got one and the same notion in our heads, and that we may stand in each other's way."

"I am much more afraid of Sir Thomas striking in before us," said Davey, "and so getting hold of a certain negotiable article which alone could have helped us severally to escape out of the pecuniary hobble in which we find ourselves. One of my men saw Tyrwhitt ride down to Holworth Bridge, and his horse's head was turned in this direction. If notions get into our two noddles, be very sure that the same lodge in the brain of that shrewd knight."

"This is serious," said Hullett.

"Therefore, let us endeavour to circumvent him."

Nothing further passed between them till they reached the door of the Manor House, where they dismounted and gave their horses to a groom.

"How is the master?" asked Hullett of Rebecca, who answered the bell.

"Middling, sir. He is just as set on that there is nothing the matter with him as he was at first, and he will not allow a doctor to come near him. Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt is upstairs with him now."

"Go, Rebecca," said Hullett, pressing a half-crown into her palm. "Try to induce your master to receive us. It is really important that he should not be left with—I mean that he should see Captain Davey and myself. Sir Thomas has a depressing effect on him; we, on the other hand, one that is exhilarating."

The housekeeper slowly mounted the stairs, leaving the gentlemen below. She knocked at her master's door and entered, leaving the valve open behind her, and those below, who were divesting themselves of their wraps, heard themselves announced.

"Who? Who? Hullett and Davey? Show them up," in Thirkleby's voice, the words shrilly spoken.

Then they heard Sir Thomas say something in remonstrance, but they could not catch what he said. The vicar's response was clear: "What! I am to be dictated to in my own house? I may not see my friends when it suits my convenience? Show them up, Rebecca."

Again the Warden of the Stannaries spoke, but too low to be audible, and the housekeeper departed.

"You may come up," said she curtly, before she had descended half-way, and turned again to precede them to the landing.

"He has, as yet, not prevailed with the vicar," said Davey, in a low tone, and a chuckle.

The two men mounted the stair, and were ushered into the sick chamber.

Mr. Thirkleby made a futile attempt to rise: "You must excuse me; I have a twinge of gout, and am a prisoner. How d'o', Hullett, and you, Davey? Too much of my port

the other night, and spirits piled on top of that. Now I am fast by the big toe for a day or two. Here is Sir Thomas taking a confoundedly mean advantage of me, and preaching —preaching at me."

"Happy are they that hear their detractions, and can put them to mending," quoted the knight. "Well, vicar, you have preached at us, and must expect a return. A word of advice is what, at times, is salutary to all."

"By the bird of heaven!" exclaimed the Reverend Josiah, "I am like that exemplary character, Job, with my three miserable comforters. But glad to see you, Hullett. Very good of you to come, Davey, and cut short an address that was becoming unduly protracted."

"What is the theme?" asked Davey.

"The theme," replied the parson, "is free surrender. The text he has not got, but wants it."

"Gentlemen," said Tyrwhitt, "come to my aid. I am endeavouring to induce our good friend here to put a certain document behind the fire."

"What—destroy the evidence—the only evidence that poor girl Georgie has to show whence she springs, and to enforce certain obligations undertaken regarding her?" asked the vicar sneeringly.

"Retain such letters and contracts as concern her," replied the knight; "put them into the hands of someone who may be trusted to protect her interests. But, for God's sake, Thirkleby, burn the memoirs."

"I don't know that I can back your recommendation," said Hullett. "The memoirs are a marketable commodity."

"Marketable they may be," retorted Sir Thomas, "but are you justified in selling what may do irreparable mischief?

> 'Thou thyself hast been a libertine;
> And all the embossed sores, and headed evils,
> That thou with licence of free foot hast caught,
> Would'st thou disgorge into the general world?'

Besides, is it fair? Is it honourable? How would you, Thirkleby, like someone who knows you intimately to

reveal to the public all your little weaknesses, lapses, and transgressions?"

"When I am dead—let him do it. I care not."

"But a person of consideration is concerned, one who is not dead. Probably he deplores mistakes once made. Is it seemly to rake together and to disclose to the public eye past follies and faults? Is he one in a position to descend into the arena and defend himself? I regret to have to express my opinion, but I do maintain that it is dishonest for a man to associate familiarly with a great personage, to share his confidence, and then to betray him. Excuse plainness of speech —but in my eye, for one to act thus out of sordid notions is infinitely base."

"I have been neglected and set aside," said the vicar sullenly.

"You have been given a trust, and paid to undertake this trust. One of the conditions was that you should live in a retired place, removed from the current of fashionable life, and away from general observation."

"That was for a while. Consider the number of years that I have been in banishment. I did not sell my entire life. I have been inadequately paid. I have been thrust off with a pittance, a despicable pittance. I resent it. I will not die here the death of an outworn ass. I intend to have my fling away from this confounded well, into which the sun rarely shines."

"There be such," said Davey, "as think themselves justified in taking advantage of you, but who hold it high treason in you to demand of them legitimate rights."

"It is so," threw in the parson. "He is a fool, who having the means of making himself felt, casts aside his chances. What says your own darling author, Sir Thomas?—

> 'Who seeks, and will not take, when once 'tis offer'd,
> Shall never find it more.'"

"Then I was a fool," exclaimed the warden hotly, "when the other night I was at your table, the sole person sober among you, that I did not sweep together your silver spoons

and forks, and fill my pocket with them. That would have been an outrage on the rights of hospitality, I take it?"

"Of course it would."

"And I call it a grosser outrage when you have been admitted to a man's intimacy, to get possession of his secrets and walk off with them. If I had taken your spoons to a Jew and sold them, I should be less of a thief and scoundrel than the man who uses his association with a man to lay hold of all the private and discreditable passages of his life, and then hawk them for money."

Davey looked quickly across at Hullett and nodded, not as approving the sentiment, but to express his satisfaction that Sir Thomas was incensing the parson against himself.

"And I say," said Hullett, "that it is a sorry trick to fall on a man laid up with the gout, and to take advantage of his helplessness to extort from him, for no consideration, valuable property, of whatever sort it be, whether in gold or in paper."

"I have appealed to his sense of honour," said the knight. "Another man's character should not be a negotiable property."

"I dispute your right to put the matter on this ground," said the parson.

"Very well," retorted Sir Thomas, in heat. "Let us place it on another footing. Are you disposed to drag before the public the whole piteous story of"—

"Amalthea?" asked the vicar, looking at him defiantly.

"As you say—of Amalthea," acquiesced the knight.

"She is dead. It cannot hurt her. Besides, I shall disguise the name."

"Yes, conceal what touches yourself and yours, but blurt out what concerns one who cannot defend himself. Thirkleby," said Sir Thomas, pacing the room in great excitement, "I have appealed to that sense of honour and justice which I assumed was still lodged in your bosom. I regret to find that it is a sense so blunted and blurred as to be unresponsive. Come, then, let us descend to traffic, like a couple of tradesmen."

He seated himself at the table, drew a cheque-book from his pocket, and with one hand swept towards him an inkstand on which was lodged a pen.

"Ten thousand, you said?"

"No—thirteen."

Hullett whispered Davey, who nodded.

"I will say thirteen," exclaimed the former.

Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt looked up sharply, with surprise and anger.

"For Heaven's sake, Hullett, do not interfere."

"Thirteen!" vociferated the Reverend Josiah, becoming in his turn excited.

He caught up a paper-cutter, the handle of which was composed of a fawn's foot. Grasping this by the ivory blade, he rapped on the board.

"By the thunders of Jove," said he, "we shall hold an auction. Thirteen thousand! Going for thirteen!"

"Fourteen!" said Sir Thomas, in a quivering voice. He was hardly able to speak for indignation.

"Going for fourteen!" said the parson.

"Fifteen!" threw in Davey.

"Fifteen!" shouted Thirkleby. "Captain Davey has it for fifteen. Who will bid higher? Eh, Sir Thomas? Consider the consequences. Fifteen—going!"

He raised the paper-knife.

"I have not been empowered"— began Sir Thomas.

"Fifteen—any more?"

The knight raised his hand, and looked fixedly in the face of the vicar.

"Going—!"

The paper-cutter fell from the hand of the Reverend Josiah, as he sank back in his chair speechless and apparently lifeless.

"Gone!" said Sir Thomas. "Help me to convey him to his bed."

CHAPTER XI

FIGGY PUDDING

"FIGGY puddin'!" exclaimed Richard Furze, the yeoman. "Figgy puddin', and no Samson here! Old woman, did you let out what was to be for dinner?"

"Yes—you heard me."

"I can't cipher it. Figgy puddin', and no Samson here!"

Figgy pudding, be it intimated, in parenthesis, is one made of raisins.

"Where can Samson be?" inquired the farmer, helping himself to an enormous slice of the pudding, and then crowning it with a dessert-spoonful of clotted cream.

"Where Samson is—that is best known to himself," said Mrs. Furze grimly. "If he ain't rabbiting he's courting."

"Courting!" exclaimed the father. "Let him do that in odds and ends of time—it shouldn't interfere with his dinner, and figgy puddin', too. Is he off his appetite?"

"I suppose you never was, Richard, when a-courting of me?" said his wife sourly.

"Can't say I ever was, though you've took away my appetite since us was married, many a time."

"It don't concern you whom Samson is after?" asked the woman.

"No more nor what rabbit he's ferreting," replied the farmer, ladling the pudding into his mouth. "One maid is like another as one rabbit resembles another."

"That's an uncivil thing to say to your wife."

"In the pursuit, I mean, not in the eating. On my word, old woman, some are tough, and others leave a bad taste in the mouth."

"You will let a spark lie among your straw and not put forth your foot to stamp it out, and when the rick is blazing bray for water."

"I do not understand you."

"You sit eating and enjoying your figgy pudding"—

"I must say, Susan, you're doing your best to spoil my relish of it by the sauce you add."

"Let me speak on. There you sit thinking of nothing but your enjoyment, and all is ripening for a harvest of trouble. Whom think you our Samson has set his mind on?"

"I do not know, Susan."

"One, I tell you, Richard, who, if she comes in here will make the house too hot for you and for me. I have marked it for some time, but I've said nothing. Now it is for you to interfere."

"Whom, then, is he after?"

"The parson's Georgie."

The yeoman dropped his spoon, leaned back and laughed. This irritated his wife.

"You may laugh now, Richard; but let her get her finger in here, and after that there'll be no laughing for you and me. She will disdain us, with her high ways and scholarship—a foreign wench as knows nothing of our sorts."

"She has been reared here."

"But reared—to follow her own head, do her own will, not to orderly work and to minding a farm. What good would she be in a place like this? She would give herself airs and be the grand lady—and she, they say, with the blood royal"—

"Get along, wife. That is all village gossip. Do you think King George would leave a child of his here in Wellcombe? I don't believe one word about it."

"You believe she's come the wrong side of the blanket, I reckon. Thank God, in the Furze family there have been proper and right women about whom something is known—who were their fathers and who their mothers. I've no fancy for a son of mine to stoop to such as she—even though there be the blood of kings in her."

"Idle talk."

"It is not idle talk. Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt knows it, Squire Hullett knows it, and so does Cap'n Davey. They have been in London, and know more than do we down here. That is one thing I have against it. I'll have no daughter brought here that was not honestly got; I care not so much by whom, as that she be honest got. Then, what use would she be in the house? Can she milk a cow? mind a dairy? scald cream? She is tearing and galloping over the moors, she goes hunting with the fox-hounds and harriers. She is no stay-at-home as a farmer's wife should be. I doubt if she can mend her own gown. And she has a temper."

"There, wife, you would find your match."

"I know that if we struck the sparks would fly out, and who would burn?—not I nor she, but you, as a bit of tinder. There you are, eating your figgy pudding, and careless that I am disregarded and insulted."

"How are you disregarded?"

"By Samson going after that parson's Georgie, and never saying a word to me about it."

"I knew nothing of the matter."

"More shame to you. You ought to have known."

"When were you insulted?"

"Insulted I shall be, for certain, if that girl comes into the house. But I will take care she does not cross this threshold. You—you would not help me, so long as you had figgy pudding to occupy you."

"Well, wife, you need not complain of what has not as yet come about, and which, as you say, you will take care shall not chance to happen."

"You leave it all to me to protect our house, and do nothing yourself."

"I don't see so much amiss in Georgie Thirkleby. I reckon she'll have the parson's money and the Manor House, if she be his niece."

"Just so—if she be his niece. Who she is, none can say. And granted that he leaves her everything. What is the Manor House? We do not want it, we have our own farm dwelling; and no more land goes with the house than some four acres. As to his money, I do not believe he has any but

what comes from the vicarage—some two hundred and fifty a year—and that is all spent. You know very well he has no bank account; none in Wellcombe have seen a cheque of his drawing."

"He was mighty flush of money when he came here."

"But it has all run away. He has not been running over with cash of late years. Trust me, what he had is spent, and for the last few he has been living up to his income. He who gets his Georgie gets grand airs, foreign ways, and the devil of a temper, but no money. That's not the sort of maid we want to have for our Samson."

"Well, he shan't have her, then," said the yeoman, thrusting his plate from him; "anything for a quiet life."

"And a quiet life you will not have if she comes here." Then, looking up, "Oh, here comes our Samson. Richard, as well now as never, have the matter threshed out. You stand behind me and lend me the weight of your arm."

"Your tongue, I reckon, needs no extra weight thrown on that."

A sharp answer was stopped by the entry of Samson. He was in a moody humour, and hardly saluted his parents as he seated himself at the table.

"You might make a shift to be in time," said his mother.

"I did not know how time flew," apologised the young man.

"You have not got an appetite, I suppose, as will tell you. It used to be sharp enough to strike the dinner-hour in your stomach."

Samson made no reply, but helped himself to the meat that was still on the table.

"The mutton is cold," said his mother. "What has made you so late?"

"I have been to the Manor House to inquire after the parson," replied Samson.

"And to see Her Royal Highness," snapped his mother.

"I don't know what you mean," retorted the young man sullenly.

"Oh, you understand well enough! You're vastly more attentive to the parson now that he is speechless than ever you were when he preached. And what said the princess?"

"If you mean Miss Georgie Thirkleby, I did not see her."

"So—you did not see her?"

"No; I saw Rebecca. She says that the parson is no better, and does not utter a word, and scarce takes aught."

"Oh, much you care about him, so long as she talks."

"Who? Rebecca?"

Mrs. Furze planted herself before the table, and making a sign to her husband to support her, she placed her fists on her hips and said, "Sam! I must have it out with you. Don't you think of bringing royal highnesses into this house; we don't want none of it. What we want here is healthy, wholesome yeoman blood, and none other. We don't want a fine lady as talks mincing English. We don't want a scholard as reads books. We don't want a wench as puts a feather in her hat and goes tearing after the hounds. We want one as can scour the pans, milk the cows, hem the sheets, and"—

"Make figgy puddin'," threw in Furze, and cast an eye to his wife, expecting approval of his vigorous support.

"As can cook a dinner, peel potatoes, if need be. A woman as can work in the house whilst the man works in the fields," said Mrs. Furze.

"Are you going to choose me a wife, or am I at liberty to choose my own?" asked Samson sullenly.

"You shall choose one as belongs to your class, and can do the work required of her, one of whom your father and I approve. The gander once fell in love with a she-eagle and married her. What was the result? The eagle soared above the clouds whilst the gander waddled on earth. The eagle stripped the mate of his feathers to line her nest to which the gander could not ascend, and when he died of cold and nakedness she picked his bones."

Samson flushed crimson. His mother's words cut him as had those of Georgie relative to the racer and the cart-horse.

"She is one who can turn her hand to anything she has a mind to."

"How do you know that?" asked Mrs. Furze.

"I've known her since she was a mite of a thing. I've seen it in her. She is all strength and go. If she chooses she will carry through whatever is set her."

"Sam," said his mother coldly, "a woman that loves will do that. Can you be certain that she loves you?"

His colour went. His lips quivered.

He remained silent a moment, then started up, leaving his food untouched.

"Mother," he said, "it is just come to this. If she don't have me, I shall go mad. As to seeing her about and another chap after her, I could not stand it. I should kill him in a rage. I must and will have her as mine, and if she says me 'nay' again"—

"She has refused you?"

"I say if she says 'nay' again—by heaven, I will enlist! I could not stay here. I will enlist. I will go and make sure at once. Don't think to stay me with your objections—nothing will hold me back. I will have her final 'yes' or 'no.'"

Then he left his dinner untouched, and swung out of the house.

"There has been witchcraft in this," said Mrs. Furze. "Alse Grylls is at the bottom of it."

Hardly had Samson left the house before the whole current of his thoughts was changed.

He heard the sound of men shouting, dogs barking, and an occasional blast of horn.

He knew at once what was the meaning. He ran back, threw the door open, and shouted, "Father! a drift!"

Then, without further ado, he ran to the chimney-breast, seized a stout cudgel with a leather loop at the end, and left the hall rapidly to saddle his horse, spring on it, and gallop in the direction of the cries.

CHAPTER XII

A RAID

AS Samson galloped down the valley towards the great ridge of Rowdon, he saw that men armed and mounted were issuing from every farm, and hurrying in the same direction.

To understand the sudden and vehement excitement, and the outpour of the male population of Wellcombe, an explanation must be given here of what has already been touched on casually.

The Forest of Dartmoor, that is no forest of trees, which are conspicuous by their absence, was in ancient days a royal chase. It is girt about with commons that together make up as much ground as that comprised within the forest itself. The bounds are ill defined, a rude cross, or a moorstone of peculiar shape, or a thorn tree or a cairn. Without these bounds the commons belong to the several parishes that environ Dartmoor. The commoners of these parishes have well-established rights on the royal domain itself, as well as on their commons, but the Duchy of Cornwall claims to exercise overlordship extending through these commons, and makes fitful attempts to assert this lordship.

This it does, or did, by means of *drifts*. That is to say, suddenly, and without warning, the officers of the Three Plumes "drive" the commons with dogs, and sweep together the cattle and horses found on them, and impound them. Then the freeholders are forced to go to the pound and claim their respective heads of cattle and colts, paying a trifling acknowledgment.

But it is precisely this acknowledgment that they refuse to make, as it is an admission that the duchy has rights over the commons as well as over the forest proper.

When once the cattle are impounded, it is not possible to free the beasts without paying the fee, consequently every effort is made to resist the attempt made to "drive" the parochial commons.

The instant that the householders are aware that the duchy officers are on the debatable land, they combine to fling them back.

In former days these affrays were attended with violence, and blood was shed; but during the latter part of the century just passed, the attempt to assert the claim has been half-hearted, and the resistance less savage, and a protest held sufficient to maintain the independence of the commons.

The question of rights has never been threshed out in courts. Perhaps the duchy, perhaps the commoners, are too ill provided with documentary evidence to substantiate the rights claimed on either side, to make one or the other disposed to submit them to legal adjudication.

Of quite recent days, the public press, blatant agitators, and the Commons Preservation Society are new factors to be considered, and the duchy authorities hardly dare to pretend to any rights at all beyond the limits of the forest proper. But at the beginning of the nineteenth century the condition of affairs was very different, and the duchy was unprepared to cede an inch, especially since Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt had persuaded the prince regent, now George IV., that Dartmoor was an El Dorado, which needed development alone to make it stream with treasure. And the assertion of overlordship to the commons carried with it a claim to such mineral wealth as was supposed to lurk below the velvet turf.

The news of the raid reached the house in which the master lay paralysed.

Moses ran about excitedly in quest of his young mistress, and when he had encountered her, coming to the kitchen to inquire into the cause of the commotion, he burst forth with, "Oh, Miss Georgie! Whatever is to be done to maintain the rights of the manor? We have two fine colts out, and

the duchy rascals are driving them. If they get them impounded at Dennabridge it is all up with the liberties of the manor. You know them colts. One has a white star on the forehead."

"I will go," said Georgie. "Saddle me Ruby."

"Ah, miss, I'll be glad if you do, only just to let folks see you ain't hand and glove with the duchy, as some think."

Georgie hastily equipped herself in a riding-skirt, and took down a holster-pistol from its crook in the dining-room.

"Her's laden," said Rebecca. "The master always keeps thickey wide-mouthed barker charged in case of burglars."

"I know it, Becky," answered Georgie; "but I cannot flourish a stick like the men, so I will threaten with this. Release the dogs."

In a very few moments Moses brought round the chestnut.

"I will run," said he, "and I can back you up, and, if need be, use my stick. I should love to do so. Lord bless you, what's the good o' having rights if you aren't prepared to fight for 'em, miss?"

As the girl trotted along the lane, her faithful henchman followed, and the dogs barked and gambolled. She was speedily involved in a throng of men, some running, others riding. There were among them farmers, stout and grizzled, young men, tough and solid, all armed with cudgels, or with cattle whips and goads. The dogs seemed to be as excited as their masters, and even the cobs appeared to be alive to the fact that some sport was at hand.

Farm labourers would not tarry behind; they had caught their flails, and all were pressing on, eager, with heightened colour.

"By Jiggins! They've been sharp this time."

"What, you here, Uncle Zackie, running, and over eighty years!"

"Varmer Cruse!" shouted a man who had climbed a hedge, "them beggars has cleared the down, and I reckon you'd best ride about and circumwent 'em, and not let 'em go off to the pound as they be making for."

"What! Miss Georgie here! Got a pistol! Shoot one

of them darned moormen through the head, and we'll say 'Bless your purty face.'"

The lane to be ascended was stony.

Some of the throng passed, their sturdy little cobs scrambling up the ascent like goats, and their masters flapping their legs and driving their heels into the sides of their mounts.

Ruby could not climb like one of these short-limbed beasts. Some of the men as they passed shouted a salutation to the girl. All were in the best of spirits and in the liveliest excitement. Nothing exhilarates like the anticipation of a fray.

Georgie did not see Samson. He was not behind, and he had not passed, but there were many broad shoulders rushing on ahead of her.

"If they get our 'osses into pound," said one man, "I vow I'll go all the way to Dennabridge and break the wall down and release them. I'll pay no acknowledgment."

From their homes all the urchins of the place who could toddle had broken loose to follow and partake in the sport. They could be useful in driving back the recaptured horses.

The short winter day did not afford much time for the pursuit. The duchy men had calculated on this, and hoped to get away with the lifted stock, so that the gathering darkness might render pursuit difficult and recovery impossible.

But there were always some commoners on the alert, and the signal flew like wildfire that the duchy was driving, and the men concerned were out as rapidly as if they had been anticipating the raid.

Never had a case of battery, even of death ensuing from one of these fights, come before the magistrates. No coroner sits, no prosecutions ensue after a battle between hostile forces, and commoners and duchy retainers were hereditary enemies, who settled their disputes without interference. If one was maimed and another was slain in one of these expeditions it was accepted as a fortune of war. The moor was beyond the pale of the civilised world that lay a thousand feet below, and no magistrate ever exercised jurisdiction thereon, and no lawyer was ever invoked to intervene in a quarrel. Fists and cudgels, not quills and parchments, were the weapons wielded on the moor in the feuds that recurred periodically.

So a stream of men ran uphill, scrambling along like a brawling torrent, shouting, laughing, cursing the duchy, cutting jokes on one another, and the horses snorted and the dogs bayed.

At length Georgie, together with those immediately preceding and following her, had surmounted the steep and rugged ascent, between hedges, and were out on the wild moor.

Already a contingent, ahead of the stream, was there—men running, galloping, swearing, vociferating. Already, moreover, the duchy marauders had swept together all the horses they had been able to surround, and were proceeding homeward. They had left Rowdon, and were visible as a confused black rout driving a wild herd of frightened animals before them on the slope of the farther hill.

Already, moreover, the brief day was drawing in. Thick clouds had gathered, and hung over the setting orb like sable curtains, waiting for the last fold to drop and extinguish the winter daylight.

Now it was that Ruby, the chestnut that Georgie rode, was able to show her mettle and blood. The beasts that the farmers rode were heavily burdened with the bulky bodies of their masters, but the light weight of the girl allowed her mare to stretch away and easily outstrip them. Moses was distanced. One after another of the mounted yeomen, old and young, was left in the lurch. Georgie rapidly headed the entire cavalcade.

A stream flowed through a marshy bottom, and the swamp had retarded the retreating party.

With yells and execrations, after the duchy officers headlong charged the pursuers downhill, regardless of the rapidity of the descent and the inequalities of the ground. Down went a horse and rolled over, and his rider lay prostrate, stunned. None halted to pick him up. The footers would attend to him presently. Forward they careered, as regardless of themselves as of their comrades. As a cluster of black spots against the blaze of the setting sun appeared the raiders at the head of a wave of moorland, then disappeared over the ridge. After them plunged their pursuers through bog and water, some hitting a ford, some floundering in mire.

They were over at last, all but two. One found that his horse had strained himself in his struggles and could make no further progress. The horse of another had gone deep to the saddle, and his rider, who had extricated himself, stood on solid ground blaspheming and bellowing for assistance, which the rest were too much engaged to render.

Away up the opposite hill reeled the wild hunt, and when the brow was reached the sun was set, and beneath the lowering lid of cloud lay the parting gleam of dead daylight.

And now Georgie's mare stretched away, ahead of the whole rushing cavalcade. Ruby strained every nerve, conscious that much depended on her speed, for in the next dip flowed the Walla, that bounded the forest, and there, in all probability, would be found a gathering of forest men on foot from the tenements scattered about, Riddon, Babney, and Sherill, to assist the mounted officers and defend the lifted beasts from recapture.

Georgie could hear the dull thud of other hoofs after her, but she led, and she kept the lead ; knowing what was required, she wore off to the left, describing a sweep so as to get between the marauders and the forest bounds. If they could be held in check five minutes the rest would be up with them, and, outnumbering them, retake the colts that were being driven to pound.

The darkness deepened rapidly, and in the darkness it was not possible to pick a road. The instinct of the horses must be allowed to govern them, and trust must be put in chance. If the darkness told against the pursuers, it militated especially against the pursued, for they were unable to proceed rapidly, cumbered as they were with their captures, unable to keep together a drove of horses that endeavoured at every moment to break away.

Georgie had outflanked them. She knew this rather on the testimony of her ears than of her eyes. But now she was upon them, between the retreating body and the Walla, and the frightened, plunging horses were about her.

"Back!" she shouted, drawing rein, "back, or I will fire!"

The leading tossing colts scattered in all directions as her dogs, that had accompanied her, flew at them barking.

"Aside! or we will ride you down!" called a rough voice.

"I dare you. I will fire!"

"By God!" scoffed a man, "it's a wench." Then rose a hubbub of voices in the rear. The commoners were coming rapidly down on the duchy men.

In an instant some dark objects bore down on her. She could distinguish nothing, it was as though some figures dashed in from the side; but the main body came tramping forward like a cavalry charge.

In another moment, not knowing what she did, Georgie drew the trigger.

A flash ensued, then a cry, and a man fell from his horse.

Immediately she was enveloped in a body of Wellcombe commoners who, like herself, had described a semicircle; simultaneously others charged from the rear, and the rangers of the duchy, finding themselves outnumbered, dispersed, and raced towards the forest bounds, beaten once more in their attempt to enforce claims over the commons of Wellcombe.

CHAPTER XIII

GONE!

THE scattered horses gave no concern. By morning they would have found their way back to their old feeding ground on Rowdon. But the men coming on at full swing had to be held back by cries of "Man hurt and down; keep to rear."

It was already dark, too dark for them to discern who had fallen from his horse, or to distinguish the horse whose saddle was empty, though one caught the beast by the bridle.

"Is the man killed?" shouted a burly farmer, forcing his way to the front. "Who is it? Who fired?"

"It was Miss Georgie that fired," said one who had leaped to the ground. She herself was unable to reply; her heart was beating fast and a stricture forming in her throat.

"By heavens—it is Samson!" exclaimed a young fellow as he raised the prostrate figure in his arms.

"Yes," said the man who had been shot, "it is I—Samson Furze."

"Are you bad, man?"

"I'm hit. I think I can manage to ride home; I will try."

The girl breathed freer. She had known all along who had been struck by her ball. As she fired point-blank at the duchy men, Samson had swung in between, and the shot had hit him; she had seen his face in the white light of the dying day as he staggered in his saddle, before he fell.

"How came she to hit him?" asked the farmer.

"Got in the way, I reckon," replied one of the others; "he was rounding on them, heading them, you see; and Miss

Georgie was before us all. 'Tis a pity the shot lodged where it did and not among the duchy fellows."

"But one of them was touched," said another; "I heard him sing out."

"Get Samson up in his saddle," ordered the stout farmer, "and two of you young chaps walk by him, to stay him lest he fall off again."

"Has anyone a light here?"

"None like to have—we can get one at the little farm of Creator."

"Then take him there."

About one hundred men were riding on the moor. Others on foot came running up, the latter asking what was the matter. Some had heard the shot.

Georgie rode at a distance. She was ashamed of what she had done, and she was fearful of the consequences. She shrank from asking questions. It would be out of place for her to thrust through the throng to express her sorrow for the accident. She was the only woman among all those men.

As they moved along slowly, with the injured man in their midst, all talking, questioning, expressing their opinions freely, she drew farther from them; and all at once striking her horse, galloped away without a word towards Wellcombe.

Presently the cavalcade arrived at a little rude moorland farm, a squatters' settlement, Creator. There they called for lights, and lanterns were produced.

Samson was deadly pale, and in pain. He could ill maintain his seat. He was bleeding, and the old farmer proceeded to bandage his wound, whilst the squatter's wife held a blazing branch of furze above his head, to throw a flood of yellow light over the injured man.

Samson looked about him questioningly. Then he said, "Where is she—Georgie—who shot me?"

"Oh, she has ridden off home."

"Did she not ask whether she had killed me?"

"Never said a word, but whipped her horse and away she galloped."

He thought of the dough figure, and the girl with the long pin in her hand ready to stab it. Now she had sent a bullet

into his flesh, and much cared she whether it would cause his death. This was her revenge for the blow he had dealt her.

"Shall we take you home?" asked the old farmer, "or shall we put you to bed here?"

"Take me home," answered Samson.

As the mixed body of men on horseback and men on foot went on, a whisper passed from one to another. Then they became quiet, awed for a while, and presently some angry exclamation spluttered forth; then there surged up a hoarse general body of voices of men deeply moved with strong feeling.

There had been walking beside Samson a lad named Jeremiah French, holding him up. He loved and venerated young Furze, and Samson was more open and confiding with French than with any other. To him Samson had spoken of what he had seen in Alse Grylls' cottage. And as the lad held his friend up, it was as though the thoughts of one gave direction to those in the other, and Jerry's mind reverted to what had been told him of the dough figure that was to be thrust through with pins.

Regardless of the injunction to secrecy laid on him by Samson, he detached himself from his friend, resigning his post to another, and, with his heart boiling and raging with resentment, he poured forth into the ears of the men around him the story of the bit of witchcraft witnessed by Samson.

The account fell on ground ready to receive it and regard it as one of the utmost gravity. The first effect of the communication, rapidly passed from one to another, was to awe them. They feared for themselves. The figure had been made in secret, with evil intent; and now he whom that figure represented was a wreck. It might fare thus with any one of them—the ill wish might blight their crops and blast their cattle.

Then a great wave of wrath swelled up, and carried all away with it.

The sense of their powerlessness before the mysterious and mischievous powers of witchcraft made them afraid now, in the dark, and those on foot tore up furze bushes, and ripped them into several branches, and lighted them, and led the way with

a flare, and as one blaze died out, kindled another branch at the glowing embers to send up another shoot of flame.

Then one recalled how his horse had become unaccountably lame, another how that his wife had suffered for months from internal pains which the village doctor had been unable to relieve, certainly not to cure: how the milk of his cows would not give cream; how his ewes had borne dead lambs; how his rick had caught fire; how strange tickings had been heard in the chimney-breast—and at once all these were referred to the mischievousness of the old woman Alse, or to her disciple, Georgie.

As they rode and strode along the way, they recounted to each other their misfortunes, and their conviction that they had been caused by ill-wishing; how they had said this, or acted in that way, which might have given offence to the old woman or the girl—and one worked the other up. It was well for Georgie that she had ridden home before them all.

As the crowd passed detached farms that stood a little off the road, women came forth from the deep-bayed granite porches to learn the results of the resisted drift. They raised their voices in lamentation when they heard what had befallen Samson, and were loud in denunciation of her who had first ill-wished and then shot him.

If anything further had been required to work the men up into fury, this sufficed, and cries broke out of, "Us will drag her through the horse pond!—Let her be tarred and feathered!—It's no' safe to 'ave such a creature in the place. Old Alse, her does bless sores and heal 'em, but this maid, her never did no good to nobody."

"Let be," said one man; "I'll nick her ears wi' my knife, and if I drae blid, 'er'll do no harm arter that."

"I must confiscate the pistol," said the burly farmer, who was constable. "If Samson Furze be killed, I reckon it will be wanted as evidence."

"I call it main shabby," said another, "to ride out wi' us, as though to lead us Wellcombe chaps, and then to turn around and blaze right in upon us."

"What else cu'd you expect, Zekiel?" said another. "Don't you know it's to her interest to go wi' the duchy men. Her's

got the blood royal in her veins, and blood will out and take its proper side."

The concourse rolled on, now pent within hedges, shouting, waving furze bushes that flamed; the banks of granite and the holly leaves were illumined by the glare of the torches, and birds started from where they roosted in thorn trees, and fluttered away. Some of the party fell off, going to their homes, but a considerable body pressed on, and did not stay till the Manor House was reached. The place was dark save for one window that was lighted up with a yellow glow. The curtains had not been drawn over it, nor had the blind been lowered.

"There be 'er room!" shouted a young man. "And there her be, a-gloating and a-gloryin' over the blood 'er 'ave shed."

"No, Thomas, you're out there. I reckon that be the pass'n's sickroom. The maid's room be round t' other side."

Then some shouted, "Come out! You're wanted below. Come down and answer for what you've a-done. The constable demands the pistol."

As though in response to the summons a shadow was seen moving within the lighted chamber. Then a woman's figure stood out pencilled dark against the pane. She raised her arm, and all saw her unhasp the sash and throw it open. A silence fell on the turbulent throng. They supposed that Georgie had come to the window to reply to them.

However, they were speedily undeceived, for next moment the sash was lowered, and the figure withdrew into the depths of the room.

"Gad!" said one of the men without, "that was Rebecca."

Then the clamours broke forth again. Stones were thrown at the house; one struck the door. A pane clickered and fell smashed. In another moment the fanlight above the front door was illumined and the valve was opened. In the doorway stood the housekeeper, Rebecca, in a cotton gown, holding a guttering tallow candle.

"Be still, can't you," she said, in a voice half muffled, and yet audible to all; "I pray you to begone. Did you not see me throw up the sash? That were to let the pass'n's soul out. He hev been a-lyin' still and never spoke 'most all the

afternoon and evenin'. Then you comed along wi' your rabble and hollerin' and callin'. That simm'd to rouse'n a bit, and he tossed in his bed, and said, 'There be Tom and Jerry a-come for me. I be going to enjoy myself.'"

The concourse was so hushed that every syllable was heard, though Rebecca spoke low.

The furze bushes had flamed out, and all that remained of these extemporised torches were red glowing stumps.

"Well, I seed plain as my nose as how he were a-strugglin' wi' death. So I went to the winder and lifted the sash to let his soul pass away, and he gave a sigh, and said, 'Let bucks an' 'untin' go!' and died right off on end. It were a beautiful death, it were."

Then, without a word, but with some blowing on the expiring ashes of their torches, awed by the all-conquering presence, the crowd melted away.

CHAPTER XIV

THE MS.

DIRECTLY that Georgina knew her uncle was no more, she sent for Alse Grylls, a professional layer-out of the dead.

Much, very much, had happened to shake the girl's nerve, but this did not rob her of her self-possession. Indeed, the fashion in which she had been, not brought up, but forced to bring herself up, had given to her a stability of character and strength in emergencies hard to shake.

She knew that Rebecca was a pious woman, with a strong vein of inquisitiveness running through her, and she was aware that the secret of her own history was in the box under the bed in which lay the dead man. Already, so soon as her uncle had become unconscious, she had taken possession of the key attached to his garter. Had Rebecca seen that key she would have sought to find what lock it fitted.

On the arrival of Alse Grylls, Georgina had this box removed to her own room. She had more to safeguard than her own story. That of her mother must be preserved from prying eyes. Moreover, the MS. had been entrusted to her as a solemn deposit.

A death in the house entails much work and brings individuals into the house that are not usually received. It does more—it unties all tongues.

Georgina knew nothing of her uncle's family. She supposed that the obligation rested on her to communicate with his relations. But who were they? She examined his desk for letters that might throw light on his family, but found

none. Letters there were, from friends and acquaintances in the *beau monde*, but none that spoke of kinship. She looked for a family Bible, with records of births and deaths ; there was none such.

Georgina was surprised and disappointed not to see Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, who alone, she supposed, knew anything of her uncle's early life. She had calculated on his coming at once to the house to offer his assistance ; but upon inquiry she learnt that he had gone to London on business, and it was not known when he would return.

There was, accordingly, nothing that could be done except make preparations for the funeral.

For a couple of days the girl had on her mind anxiety for Samson Furze ; but she learned to her relief that he was in no serious danger. The slug had struck and glanced along a rib, had run round his body, and lodged near the spine, without injuring it ; so that when extracted, all he suffered from was a flesh wound.

The loss of her uncle, or guardian, was serious. She had not loved him. Much in him had repelled her. There lurked deep in her heart a sense that when his presence was withdrawn, when a room was closed, and she knew that within lay his silent form, when she sat at her meals alone, when she heard no tread on the stairs save that of servants, —a sense that something was gone out of her life. She was conscious of a desolation that was strange to her.

She was well aware that none in Wellcombe save Alse Grylls and Samson Furze loved her. Rebecca was cold and canting, Moses was stupid. Her young life had been full of battles, of resistance to insolent familiarities, and she had come to regard all mankind as hostile, and all Wellcombe had come to regard her as proud. She knew what was the general feeling towards her, and could not but suspect that feeling, formerly latent and vague, had been rendered acute by what she had done to Samson.

A funeral is a function of supreme importance in the west of England. We are ushered into the world with none of the pomp and circumstance with which we are shovelled out of it.

The Manor House of Wellcombe had to be thrown open, that a stream of people might pour in and pour consolation down their throats.

Georgie did not propose appearing and attending the interment; but Mr. Hullett and Captain Davey, together with the entire parish, would assist as mourners. She sat in her room and did not descend. She heard the tramping of feet, the click of glasses, and the buzz of voices.

Provisions were laid out in the dining-room.

"Ah!" said the churchwarden, "he was a right proper pars'n and no highflier. He never meddled wi' nobody."

"I've heard," said a Dissenting farmer, "that he had a vision of angels at the last."

"Ah!" said a third, "he made a blessed end. He had the right thing, assurance."

"There you are," said a local preacher. "Assurance is the word. Rebecca tells me she heard him say he was going to enjoy himself, and if that be'nt assurance, what is it? That is what I call having comfort at the last. Give me assurance and—I'll trouble you for another drop of gin."

Then came the trampling down the stairs as the coffin was being removed, and the throng cleared out of the passage, wiped mouths, adjusted the expression of their faces, and poised themselves easily on their feet.

Next minute the house was hushed.

The procession was on its way to the church. Georgie sat in her darkened room, by the window. The blind was down, and a dull yellow light suffused the chamber.

Tears were on her cheek and her face was pale. She was wearing black for the first time in her life, and that brought to her the seriousness of the occasion. She was thinking of the man being borne to his grave, and thinking with a sick sensation at the heart, caused, not by grief at her bereavement, but by shame that she did not grieve more.

She wished that she had loved him, that she had been able to love him. She reproached herself for having felt indifferent in the past, and for absence of poignant sorrow in the present. Was she heartless? Thirkleby had never inspired her with a

generous emotion, afforded her a noble thought. He had never pointed out to her a high ideal, nor taught her to discriminate between right and wrong. Some ideas had penetrated her head from the sacred words that had passed over his lips in church, but these had been as rays through ice, that gave no warmth to the medium. He had taken on him now and then to counsel her, but then had proposed motives for conduct sordid and low.

And now she wept and fired with shame because she was so callous. Rebecca was in tears of genuine sorrow. Old Alse had wept. But the dew on Georgie's cheeks was not due to grief for him she had lost, but at the revelation to herself that she was heartless.

Was it because she was unfeeling and unloving that she was disliked in Wellcombe? How was it that she was friendless, whereas every other girl had friends?

But every other girl had relatives. It is from relationship that other ties spring.

The house was still. None moved in it. Rebecca was in the kitchen in a chair weeping. Now only, that the owner and occupier of the house had been removed from it, did Georgina consider that she was justified in opening the iron box and looking at the bundle of papers preserved within, the custody and ultimate destination of which had been confided to her.

Partly to divert her mind from the distressing thoughts that crowded it, Georgie went to the chest, unlocked that, then opened and drew forth the iron box.

She easily arranged the letters on the barrel lock to form the word Faro, and instantly the lock fell apart, and next moment the bundle of papers was in her hands. It rested in an upper tray. But this she did not notice in her eagerness to secure the package.

She took this up and read upon the docket, "Revelations of a Man about Court."

The parcel was enveloped in brown paper, bound about with pink tape, and was sealed. The late Reverend Josiah Thirkleby had never employed a coat-of-arms or a crest, only a cornelian seal with his initials cut in the stone, a seal that

Georgie had secured. The ends of the paper were fastened with red wax impressed with J.T.

Again she looked at the slip of parchment attached to the bundle. It conveyed no intimation that within was the secret she desired to know, the story of Amalthea.

She broke the seals, tore off the tape, and undid the wrapper.

Within was a thickly written manuscript. Sitting close to the window, with a ray of light that pierced between the blind and the frame falling athwart the pages, she began to read. But not through from the beginning. She dipped into the MS. in several places, and it seemed at first sight to be made up of anecdotes about persons of whom she had heard her uncle speak when in the society of Sir Thomas and Mr. Hullett.

But presently she came upon a connected story that concerned one of the highest rank in the land. But she nowhere lit on the name of Amalthea. Yet repeatedly she saw an *A*, followed by a dash. She read eagerly, her hand trembling, so that at times she could hardly decipher the words. The colour mantled her cheek, then deserted it, and burnt in two spots on her temples.

After a while she turned to the end of the MS. and there found attached to it a red morocco pocket that contained a number of letters. These she looked at with even keener interest. She found notes addressed to "My dearest Amalthea," fulsome, impassioned—and, looking further, she read the signature.

She read others addressed to "My dear sister" and signed "Josiah."

She was roused by voices. The mourners, the whole male population of the parish was returning to recover its spirits, after a depressing service, in the only way conceivable by the rude mind.

Hastily she placed the letters in the pouch and folded up the "Revelations" in its cover.

Her hands trembled and her head swam. Not a letter, not a line must be left for other eyes to see.

Then she fastened the whole parcel with the scraps of pink tape, and, thinking she heard steps ascending to her own

room, thrust the bundle into the sink-well of her work-table. She had no time to re-adjust the barrel-lock of the iron case, so she shut the box about it, and locked it.

"Now," said she bitterly, "I know both what I am and what I am not."

CHAPTER XV

A SEARCH

"IF you please, miss, the two gentlemen would be glad to speak with you," said Rebecca at the door.

"But is the house still full of people? I cannot go downstairs if that be the case."

"No, miss, all have gone except Squire Hullett and Captain Davey, who have remained behind to see you. They say that they want urgently to have a few words."

"I will be with them directly."

Georgie washed her face, smoothed her hair, and descended.

The gentlemen were in the parlour; on the table lay cleared dishes of sandwiches and saffron cake, and several empty decanters. Hullett and Davey were in black, and their sable habits made the face of the one more than ever like a full moon, and that of the other like a lurid sun.

"Ah, Miss Georgie," said Hullett, composing his face and drawing down the corners of his mouth, "this is a sad event, one depressing the spirits and reminding us that we are all mortal."

"That it does, I swear," threw in Davey.

"We desire," pursued the Squire of Stannon, "we desire, my dear young lady, to condole with you, and to express to you our commiseration in the most suitable manner possible."

"And," added Davey, "my friend Hullett and I place ourselves unreservedly at your disposal; we offer to you our assistance in anything you may desire."

"Thank you, gentlemen; Rebecca and Moses have done all that was necessary."

"Ahem!" said Hullett. "But, my good Miss Georgie, you may not be aware that"—

"Happily having been spared such mournful experiences previously," interjected Davey.

"That," pursued Hullett, "that on such solemn occasions as this, there are certain—shall we say formalities, or shall we designate them obligations, to be discharged. Knowing your poor dear uncle as I did intimately, having seen him so lately"—

"As did I as well. I also was intimate," put in Davey.

"I feel that I can do no other than at this moment take on me the melancholy duty of intimating that it is usual, after a funeral, to open the will."

"The will!" exclaimed Georgie. She had not given a thought to that.

"I have reasons to surmise, dear young lady, that your uncle has constituted me executor."

"Me also," said Davey, "co-executors both. Hullett was not more intimate than myself."

"I beg your pardon," said Hullett, turning to his companion, "I knew Mr. Thirkleby before he came to Wellcombe, which you did not."

"You knew of him—that is all," retorted the captain. "I don't believe you exchanged a couple of words with him previous to your settling at Stannon."

"Well," said Hullett, "we must not argue the point now. It may be so, or it may not. Anyhow, of late our intimacy has been warm, I may almost designate it confidential. Accordingly, having a moral conviction that I have been appointed executor, or perhaps co-executor with my friend Davey, it is desirable that the will should be read at once, so that we may know how to proceed."

"I do not know that there is a will," said Georgie, somewhat staggered.

"There must be one. A man so prudent, so methodical, so far-seeing as our departed friend, would assuredly make a will so as to provide for you, his ward and niece."

Georgie stood silent. She was considering. She had looked for letters, but had no thought of a will. It was, as the gentleman said, probable that there was one.

"Of course, you understand," pursued Hullett, "that a will has to be proved. Whether you will elect to prove it in the Consistory Court of Canterbury, or in the Bishop's Court, or in the Peculiar of the Dean and Chapter, is a thing to be considered later. There are formalities and fees connected with this. The fees must be paid and the formalities undergone. Possibly the formalities exist for the purpose of the fees. All this you fully understand."

"I know absolutely nothing about it," said Georgie.

"In the event of there being no will," added Davey, "there will have to be an administration. You will have to produce your nearest relative, to whom, as you are under age, the court will grant the administration. Of course, we are assuming that you are able to establish your relationship to the deceased."

Georgie's colour changed.

"On the whole, my dear young friend," said Hullett, "I think that I ought to take on myself to recommend you to allow my good neighbour, Mr. Davey, whom the people here persist in entitling the captain, and myself to undertake a careful and systematic and conscientious search for the will among your dear uncle's papers."

"And," threw in Davey, "knowing how recently and how acutely your feelings have been tried, we will undertake the investigation without exacting your presence, unless you desire it—which alters the case."

"If an examination must be made," said Georgie, "I shall certainly be present at it."

"Oh, exactly; nothing would please us better," said Hullett; but it struck the girl that both men looked disconcerted at her assurance.

"Nothing could more jump with our wishes, I swear," protested Davey.

For a few minutes Georgie stood musing. She was profoundly ignorant. She supposed that a search for the will was necessary, and she congratulated herself that those papers she particularly desired should not be inspected by others, had been placed by her out of the way.

"As you will, gentlemen," said she. "I have all my uncle's

keys, and I will lead to his room, where he kept everything of importance. I am sure there can be nothing here. In his study, possibly; in his bedroom, probably."

"Shall we begin with the study?" asked Hullett. "It is the room adjoining this, and to be systematic we should begin there. I undertook that the search should be systematic."

The girl threw open the door into the apartment designated the study, but was the den of the Reverend Josiah.

It was a small room, the walls hung with some pictures, mostly portraits of men about town, engraved and coloured—the Duke of Queensberry, Lord Barrymore, the Count D'Orsay. There were prints also of actresses and singers—Mrs. Billington, Anne Catley, and Mrs. Waylett. Above the mantelshelf was one of the king as prince-regent, with the face turned to the wall. Every drawer and shelf was examined, but nothing was found except bills—some settled, a good many unpaid and of old date, a pile of dingy sermons that had been used and re-used during many years, and which were none of them in the handwriting of the deceased.

To make quite sure that the required document was not passed over, Hullett took down the few books from the shelves and lightly opened and shook them. Nothing flew out but dust and cobwebs.

"We must go upstairs," said the captain.

"I will show the way," said Georgie.

Hullett touched Davey, to hold him back. When the girl was on the landing, beyond earshot, he said, "She watches us as a cat does a pair of canaries. Engage her in conversation, Davey. Then I may have a chance to secure the 'Revelations.'"

"No, you do that; you have the gift of speech. Let me search."

"She is calling," said Hullett; "she will suspect us if we tarry here whispering together."

"She does not trust us," observed Davey under his breath.

Both men ascended the staircase.

"We have been discussing a point together," said Hullett. "Did your uncle employ a solicitor? If so, the will may be in his custody. He ought to have been invited to the funeral."

"I do not know that he employed a lawyer," answered Georgie; "I have seen none here. He detested the lawyers, and was for ever launching out against the profession."

"Not without cause," said Hullett. "Well, we must search this room. There is a bureau."

The girl produced a bunch of keys and unlocked it. Both men eagerly pulled out the drawers and ransacked their contents; and each, as he did so, watched the other with a jealous eye.

"There may be a secret compartment," said Hullett. "What think you, Davey?"

The gentleman addressed measured the drawers, peered into the pigeon-holes, tapped the sides and the back of the bureau, but found no secret receptacle.

All the papers that were turned out were gone through cursorily, but with sufficient attention to ensure that no document of importance had been overlooked.

Suddenly Hullett raised himself erect from the table, where he had been investigating old letters.

"There was a chest under his bed," he exclaimed excitedly. "I saw it when I was here last. It has been removed."

"Yes," said Georgina, "I had it transported to my room."

"Oh, indeed—why so?"

"I had my reasons."

"Will you permit that we explore its contents?"

"Certainly," answered the girl, "if it be not troubling you too much to step into my little sitting-room. It is on the farther side of the landing."

The men pressed forward, eagerness depicted in their faces.

Georgie drew up the blind, and thrusting back the little rosewood work-table against the wall, partly leaned against, partly seated herself on it.

She gave Mr. Hullett the key and he opened the chest. At once he exclaimed, "Oh, there is here an iron despatch box with a safety lock!"

"By Jove—it is open."

"How comes that?" asked Hullett. "The will must be here."

"I will swear to that," said Davey.

The padlock was thrown off and the lid was raised. It disclosed an empty japanned tray. Hullett raised the tray, and both men uttered an exclamation. The compartment revealed was deep in bank-notes of various values.

"Why," said Davey, "no wonder he kept no bank account. He has been hoarding his money. There must be thousands of pounds here."

"But no will," said Hullett. "Miss Georgie, you have come in for a fortune, if you are his niece."

"Oh yes; I am his niece."

"Not only is there no will," said Davey, "but there is also no"—

Hullett checked him; then, after a moment's consideration, said, "Miss Georgie, excuse my alluding to it, but there was a manuscript that the dear late vicar showed us on the evening of last Accession Day—in fact, on the night before he had his first attack. He confided to us that it was his private diary, and contained many particulars that—ahem!—were hardly fit for a lady's perusal. He—you will bear me out, Davey—he made a remark that he would be very loth that it should fall into unsuitable hands—I mean innocent hands—and that"—

"I swear to it," said Davey; "we were to take it away and destroy it."

"Not destroy it," corrected Hullett, "but place it in safe keeping, where it could do no harm. To be frank, my dear young lady, he was particularly desirous that this document should not be perused by you."

"You had better proceed with your search for the will, and leave the consideration of this diary till later."

"It must be somewhere. That I am prepared to swear," said Davey.

"Wherever the diary is there the will is also," said Hullett, who had been musing. "We know the looks of the manuscript, for we were shown it. It is in a cover of brown paper, bound about with red tape, and is sealed. He considered it important, that is to say, important to himself, that his old recollections of perhaps rather free and fast days should be taken care of by his most intimate and trusted friends, who

would preserve his character unblemished. He is certain to have put the two together. It is not the diary we care so much for as the will."

"How can you say that?" asked the captain, "when the good name of our dear deceased friend depends on the suppression of the memoirs, whereas the future of our dear young friend is bound up in the discovery of the will. To me a sacred duty lies on us, I think, to find both."

"Ha!" said Hullett, "there is a work-table in the window. Would you move aside, Miss Georgie: a work-table with a capacious well. You do not think"—

"This, sir, is my room. My uncle never entered it," replied Georgina. "In that I keep my needlework. The will is most certainly not there."

"THE WILL IS MOST CERTAINLY NOT THERE

CHAPTER XVI

SUITORS

DAVEY knelt by the chest, lifted out the iron box, and dived among the bank-notes.

"These should be totted up," said he, "and the numbers of the notes taken as a precaution in the event of fire or burglary. There is a handsome sum here."

"It is very aggravating about those recollections," said Hullett; "exist they assuredly do. They contain, doubtless, some racy stories, and if published would make some folk now living dance like bears on hot plates. Therefore, it is our moral duty, Davey, to see that they do not fall into unprincipled hands. It is a holy obligation that we owe to the dear deceased."

"I suppose I should be allowed a voice in the disposal," said Georgie, with twitching lip. She had begun to read these men.

"My dear young friend, from an elevated and moral standpoint—No. They would not be proper reading for so refined, so innocent a person as yourself. Your departed uncle—blessed saint!—was, through no fault of his own, associated at one time with personages that bore but indifferent characters, and although he was aware of their misconduct, he was no partaker in their evil deeds."

"Not in the remotest degree, on my soul I swear," threw in the mining captain.

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Hullett, with a start, "is it possible that our deceased friend can have been so indiscreet

as to commit the will and that other article to Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt?"

"Of that I am no judge," said Georgie coldly. "To me he never alluded to his will."

"But did he see Sir Thomas—I mean privately?"

"Oh yes, immediately after you dined here on Accession Day. He came with a porcelain bowl."

"No," said Davey, "that won't do. We saw him later than that, and then you remember how we bid against him."

Hullett impatiently trod on Davey's toe.

"Quite so," said he hastily. "We did bid—we bid your uncle not agitate himself whilst unwell. Sir Thomas is fond of good stories. He was with the vicar, and was drawing him out. We intervened and bade him desist."

"Is there no other place where we may look?" asked the captain.

"There is an attic chamber," answered Georgie, "of which my uncle kept the key, and into which he suffered no one to enter."

"It is unquestionably there!" broke from Davey, with revived hope, and his face flushing redder.

"I hope, for our dear young lady's sake, that it is so," responded Hullett. "You quite understand, Miss Georgie, we will spare ourselves no exertion in our endeavours to relieve you from difficulties. As my comrade Davey says — an administration would be a great annoyance. It would require the taking of a most exact inventory, and of the appointment, should there be no relative, of an administrator, nominated by the court."

"Look where you will," said the girl. "Here is the attic-chamber key."

The three mounted to the topmost landing, whereon opened the servants' bedrooms. But one door had a peculiar lock, to which fitted a key of remarkable wards.

The two men became visibly excited and flurried, so that the hand of Hullett shook, and he blundered with the key and could not insert it in the lock.

"Allow me," said Davey, taking the key from his colleague, and himself fumbled with it as ineffectually.

"It is hampered," said Hullett.

"It is the wrong key," protested Davey.

"We must break the door down," said the former.

"Let me just essay the lock," said Georgie quietly. "See, there is something in the tube."

She cleared the key, and without difficulty opened the door.

A strange sight was revealed.

The attic room was not large, but it was crowded with articles of furniture, an inlaid bureau, a chest of drawers, and tables. On these stood massive silver candlesticks, teapots, salvers, urns, forks and spoons and ladles of silver, in extraordinary profusion. One or two cases that were opened disclosed jewels. Against the walls hung oil paintings, probably by masters, and of value. But all was buried thick in dust, and folds of cobwebs hung in curtains everywhere.

Regardless of the plate, Hullett and Davey drew out the drawers of the bureau, chest, and tables. Within were old garments of moth-eaten velvet, rich lace and embroidery, and many parchment deeds. The two men fastened on these latter.

"By the life of Pharaoh," said Hullett, "here are title-deeds —security for money advanced and not repaid. Our dear lamented seems to have done business in lending money to gentlemen and even nobles in the retinue of His Royal Highness. I suppose some have never redeemed—but here are accounts, yet no will and no revelations."

"These are all articles taken for bad debts or as securities," said Davey. "I wonder our dear deceased had not realised long ago."

"My good Davey," said Hullett, "he did not purpose spending all his days in this hole. When he went out into life again, then it was his purpose to make a splash. Miss Georgie, if you are, as I presume you are, heir to all this, and have a good man of business to help you, a screw can be put on certain great folk whom I will not name. You will be a wealthy woman, and a catch."

"Pshaw!" said Davey. "Don't buoy her up with fantastic

illusions. Much of this plate is old fashioned—these jewels are paste, and the deeds are here, simply because they are valueless."

"When I look closer, I see you are right," said the squire. "Now we will lock up again. No will yet, and I greatly dread an administration."

Both men descended from the attic, whilst Georgie relocked the door.

On reaching the landing both men turned, and Hullett said to Georgie, as she descended to them, "If you should chance to light on the will or the 'Revelations,' you will not fail to communicate with us immediately."

"Send a boy on horseback. I will give him a shilling," added Davey.

"I suppose we must wait for and consult Sir Thomas," was Georgie's answer.

"Sir Thomas!" echoed both men, presenting their faces, one white the other red, full on her. "On no account."

Then added Hullett, in a confidential tone, "My most dear young lady, do not trust the knight. He has courtly and ingenuous manners, but they varnish a treacherous inside. Believe me, he is your worst enemy. We, on the other hand, may be homespun and plain, but we are true."

"I swear it, on my soul," exclaimed Davey.

"We have not found the will yet," returned Georgie. "There is time, and we will postpone the consideration of Sir Thomas's character."

The men turned again and continued their descent.

"Your hats and sticks are there," said the girl, pointing to the marble table in the entrance hall.

The visitors took the hint, at least ostensibly, and drew on their overcoats, and after bows and protestations—

"Allow me!" said Hullett to the captain, "allow me to open the door to you. *Seniores priores.*"

He held the valve whilst Davey passed through. No sooner, however, was his comrade outside than Hullett hastily shut the door, excluding Davey, and fastening it, said, "A word with you in private, my dear Miss Georgie; one word with you without that blazing red turkeycock without. I will not detain

you one minute. Ah! you will, will you?" This last adjuration was addressed in a low tone to the captain, whose hand was fumbling at the door. He objected to be left outside, and was seeking admission.

Hullett ran the bolt into the catch, then, addressing the girl, "One moment. The matter is grave—in the parlour."

Without speaking Georgina led the way into the room indicated. As she did so she could hear Davey turning the handle and pressing at the house-door with his shoulder.

Hullett followed into the parlour, that smelt of spirits and saffron.

"One word only!" He stood before her, his broad white face exuding moisture at every pore, folding and unfolding his large flabby hands.

"My cherished young lady, I am not really as old as I appear. With the shadow of your recent bereavement over you I should not have thought of broaching the matter that lies at my heart, till a more suitable occasion. But your circumstances, the difficulties in which you are placed, the designing men that surround you, make it an imperious necessity for me to speak and throw the ægis of my protection over you. I am young at heart, my age is not what is supposed. I have a miniature of myself at Stannon which does more justice to me than—than I do myself. If you would allow, I will show it; I will do more, I will give it you. Confound that fellow! tired of turning the door handle, he has pulled the bell."

"Allow me." Mr. Hullett stepped into the passage, and as the housekeeper emerged from the back premises, "It is a mistake, Rebecca," said he airily; "I accidentally touched the wire with my cane. Return to the kitchen, my good Rebecca, and here is a shilling for your unnecessary trouble."

Then he stepped back into the parlour.

"I must be speedy," he said; "that human poppy Davey is intolerable. Nothing but a dominating sense of duty and an over-flowing compassion would make me speak at such a time as this. Confound that fellow! He has come round and is at the window peeping in. I will stand out of his range

behind the curtains. Will you oblige me, dearest Miss Georgie, by looking unconcerned, as though you were not being proposed to. If you could apply your kerchief to your eyes, the action would be appropriate, expressive of sorrow, and he might not think I was in the room. Miss Georgie, though I wage a struggle with myself, speak I must. I offer you my hand and my place, Stannon. The mansion is not yet built, but the lodges have been erected, and a stable. The house shall be constructed to your taste, in the villa, or *château orné*, or the pagoda style. Say the word. It need not be divulged. I shall thus be by you, and with increased zeal shall strive to obtain for you all that you claim, and relieve you from all annoyances."

"Mr. Hullett, I am obliged, but it is impossible."

"What is impossible?"

"That I can think of such an alliance. It is very good of you"—

"Curse that meddlesome creature!" exclaimed Hullett. "Davey has gone round to the rear, and is come in by the back door."

He darted from the parlour into the hall just as the captain issued from the kitchen.

"Hallo, Hullett! What is the meaning of this?" asked the red-faced gentleman.

"Meaning? Nothing," answered the person addressed. "The end of my cane must have inadvertently touched the bolt and projected it. I was engaged in wrapping the muffler round my throat. I am sorry."

"Say nothing. I came round by the back because the bell was not answered. Now let me return the compliment and see you out. *Minores priores*."

Mr. Davey undid the bolt and raised the latch. Then he stood back bowing, and signing to his comrade to lead the way.

Hullett could not now in decency refuse. Davey saw Hullett out and followed him. But when on the steps he halted, put his finger to his lips, "Psha! Psha!" said he. "I have forgotten my gloves." Then he stepped back into the lobby, shut the door and turned the key.

"Now, Miss Georgie," said he, "pasty-face is out of the way, and I have a moment in which to speak to you on matters of vital importance. May I have a word with you between four eyes in the parlour?"

"Surely, sir, you can say it here."

"I must be brief. And I will put my thumb to the keyhole, lest pasty-face should pry. My hair is white, and I am old. I am in reality older than I look. But a young man's slave would be an old man's darling. I am a widower. Mrs. Davey number one had a very happy time with me. If she were here she would tell you so. I am an easy man to get on with. I adore the sex and submit to it. I have taken a lease of the mining rights of the southern half of Dartmoor, and this will bring in an enormous fortune. I will settle everything upon you. Some chits think it well to marry an old man, as there is a prospect of speedy widowhood, and then they can choose for themselves. I must be quick—Hullett is poking his scarf-pin in at the keyhole to clear it. I have several disorders about me that must terminate fatally, and then you will be free. Meantime you require a man of business to see to your affairs and to stand up for you against that crafty Sir Thomas and the bland Hullett. Now! he has run the scarf-pin into the ball of my thumb, and it is bleeding. Stand aside out of the range of the keyhole, that he may not see you. Look how I bleed! Hullett has mismanaged his own affairs at Stannon, so do not entrust to him yours at Wellcombe. If I offer myself"—

"It is to ensure a refusal," interrupted Georgie, "so pray desist."

"But I do—I will. The first Mrs. Davey would protest to you, were she here"—

"That she objected to me as a second Mrs. Davey. And now, allow me this time to show you the door. You have found your gloves?"

She unlocked and threw open the house door.

Ruefully and with a purple face Captain Davey walked out and ran against Squire Hullett.

"I beg your pardon."

"I—a thousand times beg yours."

"Well," said Hullett, at the foot of the steps, "what success?"

"Poor, and you?"

"Poor also. I will tell you what, old man; we must work together, or we stumble over each other."

CHAPTER XVII

A VILLAGE MEMORIAL

THE two gentlemen walked in silence to the inn, where Hullett called for the cob to be put into his gig. But Davey said, "I shall ride home by and by. I have got the dust into my throat, and my lungs clogged with cobweb."

"And I doubt not some fibres of the sack given you to boot," threw in Hullett.

"Ah, you may be pleasant, but you faced the same as myself!"

"My dear fellow, do not judge others by yourself. I tarried behind and shut you out because I wanted to sound that girl and ascertain whether she had set eyes on the 'Revelations.' I do not hold that she has. Had she found or read them she would have strutted as a princess and have been very high with us."

"I don't agree with you," said Davey. "I hold that she has seen and has secured them. Was not the despatch box open? Who had unlocked it?"

"The parson may have done that, and being half paralysed was unable to close the letter lock."

"But the outer chest was locked."

"He may have been able to do that—or he may have got someone to lock it for him. He has disposed of the 'Revelations' to Sir Thomas."

"He cannot have done so. When was it possible? He had his second stroke whilst we were bidding against each other. And Sir Thomas started for London immediately after."

"It is altogether perplexing. I do not know what to think," said Hullett, musing.

"I do," retorted Davey. "That girl has them. Why did she have the chest moved to her own room, unless it were because it contained the 'Revelations'?"

"She may have known of the bank-notes."

"She had the key. If the parson had left the despatch box open, what was to prevent her seeing both the notes and the 'Revelations,' if put into the upper tray? She did not relock, because she did not know the word."

"This is serious," said Hullett. "We must get hold of the manuscript."

"I will go into the tavern and clear my brain," said Davey.

Then he entered the inn.

A good many men were there—farmers who had been at the funeral, and who now, when smoking and drinking, sat in their shirt-sleeves, with their black coats folded on the seat under them, or else on the window-ledge.

A slight stir ensued when Davey entered, and those nearest the fire made room for him. One rose from the arm-chair and offered him the seat.

He looked about him and nodded to, and saluted every man present.

"We have met with a grievous loss," said the church-warden, removing the pipe from his mouth. "There is not a Dissenter in the parish as does not lament him. No bigotry in him: we want no highfliers in his room. I warrant the bishop never had a moment's trouble wi' he. It's men o' his stamp as we want in the Church, and no highfliers. There was a parson of a different kidney here once—but there! he is gone. We want no zealots. If there is to be zeal, let us have it in the proper place, the chapel, and it's them as has zeal as get into trouble wi' the bishop; so the bishops, who wants all peaceable, they don't want no zealots neither. What is the Church established for but just to let us alone. We want to be let alone, we do. You all agree wi' me, gentlemen?"

This was acquiesced in with nods and grunts of approval.

"Down with the highfliers sez I," quoth the church-warden, "and I drinks to the coming in of peace and goodwill

along with a new pass'n as ha'n't got no zeal, and no upsetting of what is."

"Ah!" said a yeoman named Dunsford, with fleshy lips and liquorish eye, "Bellamy was the pass'n afore Thirkleby. You mind how Betsy Pomery summonsed me about that child we had, but it was arranged amicably, and never came into court. Wot did Pass'n Bellamy do but ketch me in a lane and give me a talk about it. I don't want to have no pass'n here corruptin' of our morals by talkin' of our little slips."

"It's what they call interfering with the sanctity of domestic life," said Davey.

"And see how different was Thirkleby. I were summonsed again by Joan Kellaway about her brat, and I had to pay three shillin' a week for its maintenance, which is outrageous, and eighteenpence would ha' been plenty. But Thirkleby he never said a word to me about it."

Then up spake Farmer Smerdon: "Look here, I've got fifty pound invested in Methuselah Chapel, and I don't want to lose my interest. So I do hope we shan't ha' no eloquent preacher to the church. 'Twould be a pity."

"Gentlemen," said Davey, "why should you not draw up a memorial as from the parish to the dean and chapter, who hold the patronage? This is a poor living, so they may none of 'em care for it themselves, or their relations."

"That's right," said a hind named Cleave. "Landlord Hamlin, do you put some writing-paper and pens on the table, and let us get a writin' drawed up from the inhabitants of Wellcombe, axin' for a pass'n to be sent us to our mind."

The landlord produced the requisites, and having cleared a space on the tap-house board, by brushing aside the pots and glasses, and having wiped up the rings of moisture they had left, "There you are, masters," said he. "Which of you can write the best fist?"

"Smerdon does that," was the general cry — "he is overseer."

"I ain't partic'lar," said the man selected. "How shall us begin? To the Reverend the Dean and Chaps under him?"

"Stay!" exclaimed Davey; "the proper address is—To the Very Reverend, when writing to a dean."

"And what are the chaps? Middlin' Reverend?"

"What do mean by the chaps?"

"Why, them as makes up the chapter."

"This will never do," said Davey. "Let me see." He staggered to his feet. He had already drunk a couple of glasses of spirits. He took up his position over Smerdon, leaning his knuckles on the table, and flourishing a clay pipe in the other hand.

"That will do so far," said he, and pointed with the sealing-waxed mouthpiece of his pipe to the paper. "'To the Very Reverend, the Dean of Exeter,' so far well—now go on," he hiccoughed, "go on, 'and to the Reverend the Chapter'—so. Now commence another line, 'The humble'—you have left out an *h*; put it in. Go on. 'The humble petition of the Churchwardens, Overseers, and Parishioners of Wellcombe-in-the-Moor.' That is right. Now a fresh line and a capital letter."

"You must get in an *Imprimis* somewhere," said the hind. "I've seen it scores of times in all sorts of dockiments. I should begin wi' that if I wos you, Mr. Smerdon."

"No, no," protested the captain. "We shall reach that presently. Now go on, sir—'Seeing that we have been deprived by death of our lamented minister, the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby, Master of Arts.' That is as it should be, I think, gentlemen?" asked Davey, turning his red face about.

"I think I should add *late* lamented," suggested Dunsford.

"I don't hold by that," said a man named Eastley. "Late lamented means that we did lament him when he was alive, and ceased doing so as soon as he wor dead."

"I can't see it," retorted Dunsford. "*Late* does not refer to the lamentation but to the minister, the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby."

"I don't hold with that no wise," said Eastley. "You can't say of a man when he is in his coffin and buried six foot underground that he was the late Josiah Thirkleby. That is only the body or remains of Josiah Thirkleby."

"Then where is he, if he is not in his grave?"

"In heaven, I suppose."

"No, that's his soul."

"Do you mean to tell me that the soul carries away with it the titles of Reverend and Master of Arts, and leaves the body without any?"

"I don't quite say that."

"Then what becomes of his Master of Arts and title of Reverend? They must be somewhere."

"Gentlemen," said the hind Cleave, "it seems to me that we can smooth the difference thus: 'By the death of the late Reverend Josiah Thirkleby, formerly Master of Arts and our Vicar.' That involves no principle; we leave it an open question whether the body or the soul keeps the Master of Arts, etcetera."

"Well, I'll consent to that," said Dunsford, "but I'm not convinced."

"Nor am I," said Eastley, "but I will waive the objection. I don't want to make difficulties unnecessarily."

"Now," said Cleave, "you can put in *Imprimis*."

"It is coming," replied Davey. "Go on, Mr. Smerdon. 'Formerly Master of Arts and our Vicar.' Now a fresh paragraph. 'And aware that the presentation to the cure is in your hands, we, the above-mentioned'"—

"I like 'the above-mentioned,'" said Cleave; "it sounds wholesome."

"'We, the above-mentioned Parishioners'"—

"Is it not throwing a slight on the churchwardens and overseers not mentioning them again?" asked Richard Furze. "I observe that at the beginning you did refer to them, and now you pass them over as if of no account."

"No," said the hind, "not at all. They are included among the parishioners."

"Then why not let them be spoken of separately as at first?" asked Furze. "I do not want to be captious, but let us have everything in order."

"'The Churchwardens, Overseers, and Parishioners,' so shall it stand," said Davey. "Go on, Mr. Smerdon. 'We, the above-mentioned,' etcetera, as agreed, 'humbly approach you with the petition.'"

"Why should we say 'humbly'?" asked Eastley. "Let

us say 'respectfully.' We ain't so over-humble here, and allow dean and chaps to ride over our head."

"Proceed, Mr. Smerdon," said Davey. "Write on, 'With the petition that, in appointing to the vacant cure, you will consider their wishes, which are'—now, Cleave, for your *Imprimis*, that"—

Davey looked round for a suggestion.

"That," said Dunsford, "in matter of doctrine he shouldn't give himself darned airs as if he was going to teach us; for, I reckon, we know just as much as the best parson."

"I can't put in 'darned airs'; the expression is unparliamentary."

"We don't want no doctrine; Pass'n Thirkleby never gave us none, and we won't stand none from his successor."

"Will this do?" asked the captain, "'*Imprimis*, in the matter of doctrine, that he should not be a man of any definite opinions'?"

"Yes," said Dunsford, "and in his preaching let him stick to generalities and never say nothing as anybody could apply to himself."

"That is reasonable," said Davey, "'and in his preaching deal with generalities.'"

"Not enough," exclaimed Dunsford. "What if the new man hears about Joan Kellaway, and ketches me in a lane between high hedges, and no gate near?"

"That is easily dealt with," said Davey. "We have but to append to 'his preaching' the words 'and private intercourse with his flock.' Will that meet your views?"

"Middling," said Dunsford. "But I'd like to put it stronger."

"Then," said Smerdon, looking up from the sheet of paper, "we don't want no mean beggar here as can't chuck away no money among us."

"No, that we don't," agreed all.

"And," threw in another, "us don't want no bigot here as shall refuse to subscribe to the maintenance of the chapel Sunday school."

"There be two chapels—one out to Lower Wellcombe."

"Then let him subscribe to both."

"But," protested Davey, "is this reasonable, gentlemen? He will have to support the church Sunday school entirely out of his own pocket, as I do not suppose he will get any assistance from the parish."

"There ain't no church Sunday school. Mr. Thirkleby never had none, but gave his half-guinea free and liberal like to both chapels. And it came cheapest so, as he were saved the trouble and expense of having one of his own."

"That is reasonable and just," said Davey. "It commends itself to one on economical grounds. Now, Smerdon, write this: 'The parish being poor, with in it no resident gentry'"—

"Don't want none," was thrown in from all sides.

"'No resident gentry in it, the aforenamed deem it expedient and advisable that the new vicar should be a man of private means, and of a liberal and not narrow and sectarian spirit.'"

"That's fine," said Richard Furze. "A man is a cursed sectarian if he holds to what he believes to be right, and ain't open-handed and free to the other side and give in to them in everything."

"Ah," said Davey, who had taken another glass of spirits, and could hardly support himself upright, "Ah, you had a rich man in Thirkleby!"

"Rich!—bah! he spent a little money just at first, but not a doit during the last few years."

"That was not because he was short of money," said Davey, wiping his mouth on Smerdon's shoulder. "He had hundreds, thousands, in bank-notes. I've seen 'em to-day. How many hundreds o' thousands I can't say, and jewels and promissory notes, and mortgages—all goes now to little missie."

"You don't mean to say so?"

"I do. Piles of silver plate, pictures worth thousands, altogether enough to buy up all the land in Wellcombe."

"I reckon," said Cleave, "us had best confine ourselves just now to this here 'In Memoriam,' and clap in another *Imprimis*."

"You can't do it, man," said Davey. "It's an impossibility to have more than one in a document without stultifying our-

selves. Then we will wind up—'And your petitioners will ever pray, etcetera.'"

"What does etcetera mean?"

"I don't know, but these memorials always wind up with it. Now it must be signed by the churchwardens, in behalf of the parishioners."

"And sealed," added Cleave. "And they must say, 'This is my true act and deed.'"

"Landlord!" shouted Smerdon, "give us a candle and some sealing-wax."

"I reckon," said Furze slowly, "that the women should be in it too. They're more religious and given to church and chapel-goin' than the men, and they likes to be considered and consulted. If they are passed over, as it were, they might make a little onpleasantness at home."

"That's right," said Davey. "Now, Hamlin, your missus, if you please, to sign here."

"I ha'n't exactly got a missus," said the landlord.

The men laughed.

"Call her housekeeper," suggested Dunsford. "Send Polly here, and bid her bring a thimble to seal with. We'll draw our pipes across the wax to signify our agreement."

"Gentlemen," said the churchwarden, "there is only one thing I have to say—and that is, I don't see no reprobation of highflier in this here dockiment."

"Why, it is all agin them," protested several voices.

"If that's the case, I don't mind signing in behalf of you all, and this here is my seal."

He dropped a blotch of red wax on the paper and marked it with the end of the pipe he had been smoking. "This is my true act and deed."

Then rose a clamour. "Polly! Come along, Polly!" It was a summons to the housekeeper.

A bold-faced, dark-eyed, handsome woman, very florid in complexion, neatly dressed in cotton, came to the table.

"Come along, Polly! You're to sign this here appeal on behalf of the womenkind of Wellcombe, the female parishioners."

Smerdon jumped out of his seat to make room for the

woman, and in so doing accidentally struck a pot of ale and sent it over, flooding the table and drowning the memorial.

"Oh, whatever is to be done!" was the general cry.

"We must begin anew," said Cleave. "*Imprimis.*"

"Can't," sighed Davey, and sunk into a chair. "I be terribly overcome by my feelings, thinking of my poor friend Thirkleby."

CHAPTER XVIII

A WOMAN'S PRIVILEGE

AN old moor farmhouse is eminently picturesque. Usually it looks into the curtilage that is surrounded by farm buildings. It is built entirely of granite, the walls very thick, and the stones set in a modicum of mortar. On the one side is the broad mullioned window of the hall or chief kitchen, and in the middle is the protruding porch, with its arched doorway under a square hood, with either the initials of the owner who built the house or the date at which it was built inserted in the spandrels.

The type having been fixed in Tudor times did not alter for many generations, and houses of precisely the same character were erected in the first half of the eighteenth century.

It was only with the dawn of the nineteenth that erections of incomparable ugliness, but happily also of flimsiness, which promise speedy decay, have risen in their places. That abysmal degradation of taste, which affected the upper classes a century ago, has now reached the farmer and the tradesman, and these at present strive to rival each other in the hideousness of the dwellings that they run up.

Furze, that either gave its name to the family that owned it or received its name from them, was one of the venerable and untouched farmhouses of the seventeenth century. Over the granite doorway in a panel was cut the date, 1682, and in the spandrels were S.F., the initials of Samson Furze, who had built the house. The roof was of thatch. The chimneys were large, granite cut, and stepped at the side to let off the water that drove against them from weeping skies.

Richard had returned from the funeral, and from its corollary the public-house, with rosy cheeks and a watery eye, but with all his wits about him.

"The pig-meat is smelling bad," said the yeoman.

"It would smell worse if I had boiled it here, and not in the back kitchen," returned Mrs. Furze. "But I don't mind the smell coming here so much as I do its getting into the dairy, and giving a taste to the butter. And it's not that only, but the styes are against the wall, and it's terrible. I can scarce a-bear it myself; it comes right through into the dairy. And, Richard, we shall lose all our customers. There have been complaints about it already in Ashburton, and at Kendals' they took Mounces' butter last week, and not ours, because the taste was unwholesome."

"You should have a new dairy on the other side."

"That is what I've told you ever since we were married; but you wouldn't hearken to me."

"I have no money to spend in building."

"If you had set a stone for every pint of ale you have drunk it would have been up years ago. It's a crying shame, and I don't know which way to look when I pass Sarah Mounce—her butter driving mine."

"Well, the Mounces, so they say, are going to sell; Jabez has a fancy to retire and put his son into the drapery trade. He has a relative in the business."

"And they have finer meadows than we."

"It would be just the making of Furze to have their meadows, but they will not be sold apart from the farm."

"My word!" exclaimed Mrs. Furze. "If only we had them meadows, what a dairy us should possess!"

"And turn out a terrible lot o' butter tastin' o' pig-stye," observed Richard.

His wife looked sharply at him, but he maintained a stolid countenance, and she could not read his mind.

"Of course we should be obliged to move the dairy," she said.

"And have one double the size."

"So I reckon."

"But that'll cost a pot o' money. I believe that Dunsford is a-thinking of buying the farm."

"Dunsford! his missus peacocking it on the Mounces' farm, as well as their own. Why, she has a hot hand such as never can make butter."

"If she has a hot hand, he is a warm man."

"Wi' his goings on he's had to pay ever so much, and all han't come out neither, but been hushed up. And how else can you hush these matters but by puttin' of bank-notes over folks' mouths. Mounces' farm would be thrown away on such as Betsy Dunsford."

"It is of no use our thinking of it," said Furze. "I haven't the ready money just now, nor for buildin' of fresh pig-styes. By the way, Sue, I've heard a rare scrap o' news. The parson has been hoardin' his money, hundreds on hundreds of pounds, all in bank-notes, and his niece has come in for it all. They do say she's worth some tens o' thousands—more than would buy Mounces' farm and mine as well, were that to be sold, which it is not."

"What, her as shot our Samson?"

"Susan, you know very well she did it by an accident. It was Samson's fault; he has told you so a score of times. You're for ever bringing it up, and he sez, sez he, 'Her didn't know I was there, and it were dark, and I, not seein' her pistol, got in the way.'"

"But she ill-wished him."

"No, she did not. He has said so hisself. Her wouldn't do it, and scat the figure up."

"Well, her intended to do it, and that be nigh as bad, I reckon."

"Only because he boxed her ears, and she flew into a fury."

"She is a spiteful, wicked creature."

"But cruel rich."

"Much good will her riches do her."

"It's my belief she'll outbid the Dunsfords for the Mounces' farm. You see there is terrible little land goes wi' the manor. And to have the house, and not enough ground to sneeze on wi'out being unpleasant to the neighbours, is poor games—specially if you hold a manor."

"I never saw no good yet as a manor was."

"Because the parson set no store on his rights. But if his Georgie marries Bill Smerdon"—

"Marries Bill Smerdon?" echoed Mrs. Furze.

"There be things more onlikely than that, and Bill is a likely chap, tall and straight and open-faced, and got a bit o' edication."

"His mother is that there Lizzie as was my Aunt Susan's maid, and got her, when old and total, to leave all her money out of the family to her."

"It was for your Aunt Susan's money that Thomas Smerdon married her. It is a look to a high shelf for Lizzie Smerdon's son to think of securing the parson's niece, and she one who, as the folks say, with blood royal in her."

"As to her blood royal," exclaimed Mrs. Furze contemptuously, "I set no store by that!"

"As Samson don't take her, she can please herself," said Richard Furze. "It's no concern of ours—only so far, that who gets the manor may make it inconvenient for us."

"Why so?"

"Why, because Bill Smerdon may come shooting over my land."

"I'll turn the dogs on him if he does, and summons him as well."

"He will be exercising his legal rights as lord of the manor."

"O Lord, preserve us! Lizzie Smerdon's brat the lord of the manor!"

"The holder of the manor can come over our land without trespass. He can do more, he can open a mine in my fields, and they do tell me that there is tin in Five Acres. The royalties will go to Bill Smerdon—Lizzie's brat."

"But the land is yours."

"Yes, but the lord of the manor has rights to game above ground and to minerals under ground."

"Is that what lordship means?"

Mrs. Furze fell into a brown study. Presently she said, "I reckon Lizzie Smerdon be holdin' of her head terrible high. If I live I'll bring her nose down a bit. It's the long-necked geese as sets their bills into the worst mud."

"She will have a just cause to hold up her head. She, as was a poor servant-woman, attending on your aunt, to be mother of a son with his tens of thousands of pounds, buying up of the land right and left, and with a daughter as has the royal blood in her."

Mrs. Furze made a gesture of impatience.

"And to be able to say to her boy, 'Bill! go and shoot and ferret over Furze to-day, just for the fun of the thing, to bring out old Susie and get a lick from her rough tongue.'"

"She won't dare to call me old Susie."

"Those low-bred creatures are the most stuck-up of all. She was into Ashburton last market day. I saw her flattening of her nose agin' Miss Folly's winder, lookin' at a turban wi' feathers."

"A turban wi' feathers!"

"You see as mother-in-law to blood royal and lady of the manor, and wi' a blazin' big dairy, and wi' the royalties from the mine in Five Acres"—

"Samson shall marry Georgie, if only to spite her," exclaimed Mrs. Furze, and swung out of the room, to stumble upstairs to where Samson lay, and there and then to insist on his doing what she had vowed a few days previously that, with her consent, he never should do.

But it is the privilege allowed to women to change their minds.

CHAPTER XIX

A CARD UP THE SLEEVE

"CROOK your arm, old man, and let me hang on," said Hullett. "I want to have a talk with you, in a lively strain, too, and to the purpose I'll sing you a song."

Davey extended his broad arm, and Hullett put his hand tightly within it. They were together on the road to the lodges from Stannon.

The spot chosen by Hullett as his country seat was not ill selected, considering the situation and the altitude. The moors formed a half-moon from the west to the east, and in this amphitheatre rose a sparkling brook that danced down among granite boulders till it reached what had once been a lake bottom, and then it lost itself in bog.

Hullett had begun to build on the westernmost horn of the moon, near an immense clatter of rocks, in which fern and whortleberry grew dense. The hills rose four or five hundred feet above the house, but that house stood twelve hundred and fifty feet above the sea. At that elevation his plantations were not likely to be successful. The lookout from the house, of which but a wing had been built, was not pleasing; it commanded a great shoulder of desolate moor, unbroken even by crags. However, such sun as allowed itself to play over the waste was caught and concentrated in this basin among the hills.

The mistake made by Hullett had been double. By his choice of situation, he had compelled himself to make a drive of a mile from the high road, and he was forced to make this drive over an infirm bottom that was mostly morass,

into which many thousands of tons of granite must be poured to ensure a foundation.

The drive was in part made, the house in part built, the ground in part cleared. The probabilities of completion were remote. Neither timber, nor lime, nor slate are produced on "the moor"; all have to be drawn at great cost, with infinite labour, from great distances, up roads of the slope of the side of a roof. Thus the cost of building on the moor is double the expense elsewhere. The only materials provided by the country are stone and sand. Hullett found that the little he had built had cost him a prodigious sum, what little road he had laid had swallowed up money as though it had been paved with guineas. He had done some planting, but at the altitude of Stannon no trees would grow. He had laid out some flower-beds, and the flowers had been blown out of the beds.

"Davey," said he, "I am going to sing you a little trifle. Listen and digest."

"You are in a playful mood."

"Kittenish at times, captain."

Then he struck up—

> "'Genefer, Gentle, and Rosemarie,
> Elderly spinsters of high degree,
> Encountered a snail on the path they trod,
> Generically designate Gasteropod.'"

Then, detaching his fingers from Davey's arm, he executed certain nimble movements with his feet on the sanded drive, as he sung—

> "'Getting up early, and down too soon,
> Taking a somersault over the moon.'"

As he ended the second line he swung round and came in face of his companion by a twirl on his toes, and with a snap of his fingers.

"I shan't make this evolution again," said Hullett, "you must rest satisfied with the single performance; but you understand it pertains to the chorus. Carry it in your mind's eye."

"I will do so," said the captain.

"Because, you know," proceeded Hullett, "it takes the wind out of me so that I can't articulate my words or give resonance to my notes as I should like. I hope you observed how I gesticulated with my legs. That is not indicative of senile debility, is it, old cock?"

"Have you been drinking?" asked the captain.

"Nothing to speak of. What makes you suppose it?"

"You are elevated?"

"I have animal spirits," replied the squire. "When I have an idea in my head, I am so—I could tread on air."

"I take it this is seldom?"

"Not often. Now I will continue—

> 'With horns erect proceeded the snail,
> And left behind him a glutinous trail.
> The snail began to ascend the wall,
> "The loathly monster will on us fall."'

Then, you understand, as before—

> 'Getting up early, and down too soon.'"

He began to caper, but without relinquishing the arm of Davey.

"Yes—I will take this chorus for granted," said the latter. "Do not distress yourself with it."

"If it should be performed with great dexterity and nimbleness of the feet, whip! around you and so facing you—the effect is delicious."

"I can believe it."

Then Hullett went on—

> "'They clutched at brushes and broom and pan,
> But their innermost depths appealed for *man*.
> For what can fragile woman expect
> From a Gasteropod with its horns erect?'"

"I follow you," said Davey, controlling the hand of Mr. Hullett. "You need not dance the chorus; sing it without evolutions."

The squire went on—

> "'Then Rogers, the gardener, swung his spade,
> He smote one blow, and the snail was dead.
> The spinsters fell on his masculine breast—
> With grateful tears bedewed his vest.
> Getting up early'"—

"Quite so—I know the chorus," interrupted Davey.

> "'"Oh, fold us in thine encircling arm,
> Secure from gasteropodic alarm!"
> "'Tis an *embarras de richesse*," he said,
> As he shook the spinsters off him and fled.'"

Mr. Hullett drew a long breath. He forgot about getting up early, and down too soon, with its concomitant pirouette, in his eagerness to say—

"Moral, Davey, moral! you see it? Clear as a sunbeam. She—I mean Georgie—must drop into our arms, succumb on our breasts. Woman cannot exist without man. It is a law of nature, social, physiological, and psychological."

"Into the arms, on to the breast of which is she to precipitate herself, Hullett?"

"Into, on to those of both. Are we not brothers? Are we not united in the same resolve at all costs to secure the manuscript? Look here, captain." Hullett's tone and manner suddenly changed. He became gloomy and his face assumed a threatening expression. "All my life's savings have been swallowed up, some in loans to—you know whom; the rest has been fooled away in attempt to create a park and mansion in this howling wilderness, which I was duped into accepting in payment of my claims. Nothing will now satisfy me but the giving of hot coppers into the palm of that same exalted personage. That can be done in one way only. We must secure Thirkleby's 'Revelations.' He knew much. He was intimate. He was trusted—not willingly, perhaps, but because this august personage was compelled by circumstances to rely on him. If we can get hold of those 'Revelations,' we can give

that party a warm time and force him to refund what we have lost."

"And I," said Davey, his red face glowing to a deeper crimson, "I also have been rooked out of the accumulations of a lifetime. I have been lured to this desolation and encouraged to spend what little was left, that I might be beggared beyond the power of causing annoyance. But I swear"— he snapped his fingers. "Let us get this manuscript, and it will be like crackers under a donkey's tail."

"We have no time to lose," said Hullett. "Happily Sir Thomas is away. Were he back, he would compete with us for the possession of the papers. Do you know why he has gone to town? It is my solemn conviction that the other day he had reached the limit of the sum he was authorised to offer, and he has gone to inquire to what extent he may proceed. It is my belief that if we can get hold of the papers of Thirkleby, which doubtless contain evidence relative to her origin, we could employ her as a means to our end."

"I see, I swear I do," said Davey meditatively. "If Sir Thomas were to get possession of Thirkleby's papers, we should be done completely."

"Done completely," repeated the squire. "But get them he shall not. Just consider what an engine, double-barrelled, we shall have in our hands if we can not only get the 'Revelations' into our possession, but also the papers connected with the parentage of that girl Georgie. By ——!" he swore, "I do not care what I do to forestall Tyrwhitt. Whether Thirkleby has hidden the papers, or whether the girl has found and secured them, they are in the house, and ransacked the house must be from top to bottom, and that without her standing by and watching our every move."

"She will not let us in again."

"We shall enter without her leave."

"How will you contrive to do that?"

"That is the card I hold up my sleeve."

"Of course you will inform me."

"My good friend, I would tell, show you everything, but the mischief is that you are unable to keep a secret. You sit in the bar with Tom, Dick, and Harry; they have no need to

pump you, for you of your own free will turn yourself inside out before them. On the day of the funeral you blurted out what we had done and what we had found."

"But I did not breathe a word about what we had not found. No harm was done."

"On the contrary, mischief was done. Have you not heard? The tidings of her prodigious wealth have been bruited about, and that fellow Samson Furze has already proposed to her, and is an accepted lover."

"You amble ahead too fast for fact to keep pace with you," said Davey. "It has not got so far as that. His mother, Susan Furze, is neighing with pride because she thinks that he is certain to be taken, and that she will be mother-in-law of blood royal, and of the manor with all its privileges."

"When I produce my card, Mrs. Furze will change her crow."

"What card is that?"

"Am I like to tell you? I do not keep wine in a leaky bottle."

"But we are united for a common object."

"That is true, but when the liquor is in you throw out all your contents."

"I also have a card up my sleeve."

"You have!"

"Ay! a trump," retorted Davey.

"Well, I will show you my card," said Hullett. "I am a magistrate. It is my duty to act in this matter. That girl is in possession without having established any legal right. I shall demand proof that she is entitled to the succession, both to the manor and to the savings of the vicar. If she cannot show it, then, in the name of the Crown, I shall make her walk out."

"I have a better card than that. Mine is a trump."

"What is that, Davey?"

"A *bonâ-fide* heir to the parson."

Mr. Hullett stood still, and his flabby white cheeks fell. "You don't mean to say so!"

"I have some very distant connections in Yorkshire, of the name of Thirkleby. I alluded to the matter once to the

Reverend Josiah, but he put it aside, as though the subject did not concern him or because he did not relish it. I have written to the north, and, as Josiah is an uncommon name, expect easily to ascertain all about him, and produce an heir-at-law."

Hullett was disconcerted, and looked it.

"Captain!" said he, "keep your card well up your sleeve till the moment comes for producing it, and till I have played mine."

"I shall use it the moment I see fit to lay it on the table."

CHAPTER XX

"JAN'S COURTSHIP"

HULLETT accompanied Davey to his lodge gates and tarried there to watch his departure, and to make sure that the missing captain took the way to Swincombe, where he lived, and not to Wellcombe.

Satisfied on this point, he returned hastily to the fragment of Stannon House, had his horse saddled, and rode as fast as the beast could carry him in the direction of Wellcombe.

As he descended the spur of the great ridge of Rowdon, over which ran the road, he caught up Samson Furze, who was walking.

Samson wore fawn-coloured small clothes, a white waistcoat, a bottle-green coat with imitation smoked pearl buttons, and about his throat was folded a blue neckcloth from which protruded the head of a large pin.

"Bless my soul!" exclaimed Hullett, drawing rein. "What is the meaning of this, Furze?"

The young man reared himself, with a look of self-satisfaction dashed with ill-humour.

"It is my mother's doing," he said.

"But in the name of wonder, why?"

"Sir, we have our reasons, which are not for all the world."

"Sam, you invite questions, got up in that provocative fashion. Who will pass you by and not lift his eyebrows and gape? We know very well that when birds put on their best plumage, it is because they are mating. And it is hardly other with human beings. They are not love-making when moulting."

"Well, sir, I do not deny that there may be an occasion for this."

"You are not on your way to your marriage?"

"Not quite that, squire."

"Then it is the next or the preceding act to that. You are about to propose."

"You are not terrible far off," said the young man, colouring.

Hullett swung himself off his horse, and, leading him by the rein, stepped along beside the youth, and sang out—

"'A-courtin' Jan goes in his holiday clothes,
All trim, nothing ragged and torn;
From his hat to his hose, wi' a sweet yeller rose,
He looks like a gentleman born.
Yes, he does! man, he does!
He looks like a gentleman born.'"

"Be you mocking me?" asked Samson, becoming very red, and clutching his stick.

"Mocking! Not a bit. Wishing you joy. Only I would it were I. I bear you no grudge. To be candid, I tried my luck in the same quarter and failed. Go in and succeed."

"You, sir! You proposed to Miss Georgie!"

"I did. But she would have none of me—thought me too old. But I am not so old as she supposes. You should see my miniature. Competent authorities assure me that it does not flatter. However, I have fallen through."

"I do not reckon that I have much chance," said Samson, losing his reserve. "As you have told me this, I don't mind letting you know that I have also been refused. That was only a little while ago. But nothing venture nothing have; and mother insists."

"You have a prodigious advantage on your side. She sent a slug into your carcass, careering about your ribs, and your life was saved by a miracle. That will tell in your favour. She must have endured qualms over that slug."

Samson shook his head.

"When she had shot me," said he sullenly, "she rode away and never concerned herself one mite and crumb about me,

whether I were alive or dead. And whilst I have been lyin' sick and mendin', her's never so much as once sent up to Furze to inquire how I were gettin' along."

"My dear boy," said Hullett, "that proves nothing. Remember, her uncle died almost immediately, and the house has been in confusion ever since. Besides, she is deucedly proud—too proud to send and let you suspect how concerned she was. But she made daily inquiries through Alse Grylls, Rebecca, and Moses."

"You think so?"

"I am sure of it."

A young man passed, and looked open-eyed at Sam. Hullett began "Jan's Courtship," and the youth laughed and his eye twinkled.

"For sure you are mocking me," said Sam.

"I am doing my uttermost to encourage you," answered the squire. "Soldiers always go into an engagement to the strains of music."

"If I fail this time," said Furze, "I will not show my face again in Wellcombe. Mother has been makin' brag all over the place what she will do when we get Miss Georgie's money. She will buy out the Mounces, and send me shooting over all the farms, and try for mines in Dunsford's meadows. It is mother's doing that I be dressed up like this. Her thinks it is the right thing. There bain't a dozen folk in Wellcombe as are not aware I be goin' courtin' to-day. Mother have been blowing the trumpet so." He paused, slackened pace, and said, "Look yonder. There are a number of our fellows outside the public-house waiting to give me a cheer and to take a glass with me for encouragement."

"They should reserve their cheer till you return triumphant. But a glass would not be amiss."

"Unless I come back accepted, I shall not come back at all. I have cash in my pocket, and I shall enlist. I won't be jeered by the men and pitied by the women and pointed at by all."

"I will do something for you," said Hullett. "I will precede you, and see how the coast lies. I have a bit of business to transact with Miss Georgie, now."

The young man hesitated.

"You will not try to cut me out?"

"On the word of a gentleman, no."

"Well," said Samson, "I do feel my courage run out at my toes. I should like a glass with my mates afore I risk what may turn my life one way or another."

Hullett remounted his horse, touched the flanks with his heels, and left young Furze behind.

He alighted at the Manor House, hitched up his horse at the gate, and rang at the bell.

Rebecca opened, but stood reluctant to admit him.

"I doubt if the young mistress will see you," she said.

"Go and tell her it is on business of extraordinary importance to her. I will wait in the dining-room."

He thrust himself into the lobby and laid his hand on the door of the room he purposed to invade.

At the same moment Georgina appeared. She looked coldly at him, and said, "I receive no visitors. I told Rebecca to deny me."

"I can take no denial," replied Hullett. "If refused admission as a visitor I demand it as a magistrate."

"What do you want?"

"A word with you alone."

"Well, then, go in yonder. I will grant you five minutes, no more. Let this be your last intrusion."

"It may be, miss," said Hullett, "that your claws will be clipped, and your power to deny me admission taken from you. But you mistake me in treating me as a vulgar intruder. I come as a friend."

"In the masquerade of a friend. Friendship is not solicited when thrust on one."

"What I have to say, let it be behind a shut door," said the squire.

"Very well." Georgie shut the valve and stood against it, holding the handle. "Say shortly what you have a mind to."

"Miss Georgie, you misunderstand me, or you would entreat me differently. There is a certain person coming presently, dressed like a popinjay, whom maybe you are expecting, and on that account resent my presence."

"I do not understand you."

"Samson Furze in his Sunday-go-best looks like a gentleman born coming a-courting. He is taking a preliminary glass at the inn to inspire Dutch courage."

"You are insolent. I will hear no more." She made a movement to leave.

"Hear me!" said Hullett imperiously. "It is a fact that this fellow is on his way hither with the object in view that I have indicated. That is nought to me. You are menaced with a serious danger. You have remained in this house, you have entered into possession of your uncle's hoard, as though all were your own. So far you have produced no evidence that you have a right to house or manor, or to any of the plate and bank-notes upstairs. What I desire to inform you is this. Mr. Davey — or Captain Davey, as they call him—has got relatives of the name of Thirkleby in Yorkshire, and these kinsmen claim to belong to your uncle's stock. They are about to assert their rights, through Davey, to the entire inheritance, to house and land, to every stick of furniture, shred of paper, and hoarded pound. He who considers himself to be the heir is on his way from Yorkshire, and may arrive any day. He will take possession of everything except your own personal property. You will, I trust, give me credit for good feeling and kindly intent in that I come to forewarn you, so that this may not explode over your head unawares. How will you meet this claim?"

He paused. The girl let her hands fall, and stood pale, with the colour dying even out of her lips.

"I am your sincere friend," pursued Hullett; "I am a Justice of the Peace, and will stand by you if you have any legal ground on which to plant your two little feet. Has a will turned up?"

Georgina shook her head.

"I feared not. A will might have made you secure. If no will has been discovered, then you must establish your relationship to your deceased uncle by documentary evidence. I know well that he disputed that you were other than his ward. That night when I dined here, he even dashed a glass of port wine in my face because I suggested that you were his niece.

There may be a mystery or there may not. It is no concern of mine. Can you furnish me with proof as to who you are, and that you are, legitimately, his nearest of kin?"

Georgie shook her head.

"I feared as much," said Hullett to himself. "She has not found the manuscript or she would have known all."

"I have reason to surmise," pursued he aloud, "that the requisite information is in writing somewhere in your uncle's hand, and with a number of letters and other documents such as will indisputably establish your relationship. If you have not found the manuscript, which bears the title 'REVELATIONS OF A MAN ABOUT COURT,' then let me urge you, in your own interest, to leave no corner unsearched, and directly it turns up to communicate with me. On no account ask Davey, who is interested on behalf of his relative. On my disinterested friendship and integrity you may rely. Will you trust me?"

She looked at him steadfastly, and answered "No!"

"No! Whom, then, will you trust?"

"No man at all. I have not yet encountered a man whom I can confide in. All I have come across are self-seeking, disingenuous, unscrupulous, all—with the possible exception of Sir Thomas."

"You say that because you know so little of him," threw in Hullett bitterly.

"It may be so," she answered icily. "Our interview is concluded, whether I find the papers or whether I have found them—in no case shall they be submitted to you."

She stood aside to let him pass out.

He turned, white and angry, and said spitefully, "You will confide, I suppose, in that jackdaw in peacock's plumage who is coming to make a leg to you and ask the honour of your hand?"

She did not answer, but shut the house door on him, and barred it.

Hullett unhitched his horse, and a few yards down the road lit on Samson.

"She is in the devil of a temper," he said.

Samson went forward in doubtful mood; Hullett looked on.

He saw the young fellows from the inn following, creeping up behind hedges, eager to learn the result of the wooing.

The young man knocked.

There was no reply.

He knocked again.

Then an upper window opened, Georgie's head appeared, and looking down she said, "Not at home to you or to any man!" and shut the window again.

When Samson was seen to turn and walk away in confusion, from behind the hedges rose rude voices.

"If this be the way for to get me a wife
I reckon I'll never have none,
I'd rather live single the whole of my life.
And home to my mammy I'll run.
Yes, I will! man, I will!
Zure I will!
And home to my mammy I'll run!"

That night the king's shilling was taken in Ashburton.

CHAPTER XXI

ALLSPICE

WHEN Georgina was satisfied that the coast was clear, she left the house that she might seek counsel of the sole person in whom she could confide, the old woman Grylls. There was not an individual of her own station in life with whom she was acquainted on whom she could rely. She felt, perhaps, less repugnance towards Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt than towards any other man she knew, but it was precisely against him that her uncle had warned her, as one from whom she must keep back the manuscript; consequently, even if he had been in the neighbourhood, she would not have been disposed to consult him.

Granny Grylls was an ignorant woman, whose range of ideas was limited by the hills that girt in Wellcombe, whose notions of the world beyond were nebulous. Yet she was honest, she was attached to the girl, and she possessed much shrewdness.

Georgina was alarmed at the menace of a true heir coming to the place to lay his hand on everything, as that would necessarily entail her expulsion from the Manor House, and driven out of that she would be homeless and without means. Whither could she go? What should she do?

She walked so fast as almost to run, and turning a corner in the lane, all but plunged into the arms of Captain Davey.

"Eh?" exclaimed he. "An agreeable surprise. Some men go to seek their fortune, to others fortune falls into their arms."

"I beg your pardon," said Georgina, drawing back and colouring with vexation.

"My dear young lady, I was on my way to call on you."

"And I, sir, was leaving my house to escape vexatious visitors."

"But some may be necessary though vexatious; to be taken as pills. Consider me as that, I am content. I have a fatherly interest in you. Look at my white hair,"—he raised his hat,—"observe my florid complexion. It is unhealthy. I am made up of a bundle of mortal complaints all tearing at me, and only suffered to live because they are pulling in different directions, and none has as yet got the upper hand."

"Really, sir, you must allow me to pass. I am on my way to Granny Grylls."

"Then permit me to attend you. No, I will not be shaken off, I will not be repelled, even by an iceberg. I am a disinterested and generous man, and I have come to have a few words with you solely for your own sake. I am one of those inconsiderate men who put their hands into their pockets and give a guinea as readily as a shilling. That is what has brought me to straits here. I have advanced a large sum of money without thinking"—

"Then surely, sir, you need not rack my brains over the consideration of your indiscretion."

"I was going to say—to explain—how unselfish and how ready I am to help. My heart swells to relieve the poor and the fatherless. When I see an orphan before me"—

"You attempt to block her way, and worry her with a detail of your merits and your follies."

"Now do not, young lady, do not! I seek your happiness only. I have left my work, my comforts, to hasten here to forewarn you against a danger that menaces you."

"You are vastly obliging, but I prefer that dangers should come on me suddenly, unexpectedly, rather than see them approach from a long way off and that I should be made miserable by anticipation."

"If you had observed me at a distance, you would have slipped aside and not bounced against me."

"That is true. I would have avoided you by going down a lane."

"Yet if you foresee a danger, you may evade it."

"Say what you purpose saying,"—Georgie spoke with impatience,—"and go on your way. The tavern, doubtless, is the point of your gravitation."

"Miss Georgie, it pleases you to flash your foils before my eyes. You do not hurt me. I come to you panoplied with good intentions. I have flown to Wellcombe to caution you to be on your guard against Mr. Hullett."

"Your intimate friend."

"Pardon me, my companion in adversity, which makes strange bed-fellows. Both of us have been outrageously bubbled by a certain person who shall be nameless. But that is a side matter with which I will not trouble you. What I have come to say is that Mr. Hullett, being a magistrate, considers it his duty to intervene on behalf of the Crown. You have not found a will, I suppose?"

"None."

"I feared as much. Then you have no right to anything in the Manor House, nor, indeed, to the house itself. If no legal claims be put in by an heir appearing on the spot who can prove his right to what has been left, the whole will escheat to the Crown. I believe it to be the intention of Mr. Hullett, as Justice of the Peace, to drop on you quite suddenly, and to take possession of everything—specie, notes, plate, land, papers, in the name of the Crown. Now, I beg earnestly that you will consider me as a friend—as a father; look at my white head, and trust me."

"What am I to do? What can I do?" asked the girl, menaced by this new danger.

"If there be no will," said Davey, "I do not see what you can do but protest. If you can prove that you are niece to the deceased, you can at least assert a right to a moiety. But there is a positive duty incumbent on you, that you are bound to discharge, if you at all value the reputation of your uncle. He left a manuscript, a sort of diary. It is, in itself, of no intrinsic value, but I am grieved to say that it contains matter reflecting on his own moral character. If Hullett should get hold of that document, one cannot be answerable for what he might do with it. My conviction is that you have found this

diary, and I recommend you to place it in my hands. Constitute me trustee of the deposit. Say nothing to Hullett; let him seal and secure what the house contains, but let it be your solicitude to place that collection of papers beyond his reach. Let me be the custodian. Place this confidence in me, and I will fight your battles with Hullett, tooth and nail, and not suffer you to be defrauded. Something shall be rescued for you from your uncle's accumulations. Indeed, leave that to me. I will see to that if you will but gain me to your side by assuring me of confidence, by the surrender to me of these papers as a trust."

"You consider it, then, of primary importance that the document in question should be placed with a reliable person, who will not abuse the trust."

"Most assuredly."

"Thank you. You have administered good advice. Will you be pleased to continue on your way? That leads to the public-house. Mine is in an opposite direction."

"But you have given me no answer."

"I will take your advice, so kindly given."

"And give up the manuscript?"

"To the right person."

"To me?"

"Oh dear, no! I said 'the right person.'"

She walked hurriedly away.

Davey stood, rubbed his head and face, looked after her, and was puzzled.

Three men, each for his own reasons, were desirous of getting hold of her uncle's memoirs and of the papers that accompanied them. She had the authority of the deceased vicar for the belief that Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt wanted them. She had seen how eager Hullett and Davey were to possess them—so eager that each sought to circumvent or countermine the other.

She did not comprehend their motives. She was quite sure that it was not regard for the reputation of her uncle.

But those papers did not contain anything directly compromising his character. The Reverend Josiah had told ugly stories of other persons, many still living, but none of himself.

But they did contain the life-story of her mother, and that was what Georgie was resolved should not pass under the eyes of such men as Hullett and Davey. She knew who she was, that she actually was the niece of the Reverend Josiah, the daughter of his sister Amalthea. But she was ready to sacrifice every right to his estate rather than produce the papers necessary for establishing this relationship. For by so doing she was giving up to public notoriety not the reputation of her uncle, but of her mother.

Georgina went on her way to the cottage of Alse Grylls and entered it.

The old woman was laying out a dirty pack of cards.

"Ah, Miss Georgie! I was thinking of you, and trying to make out your fortune. The cards don't come suant—not to my mind."

"Which is my card, granny?"

"The queen of hearts. The knave o' spades be for ever getting in the way."

"I have had Captain Davey obstructing my course hither," said the girl; "and as he is a mining captain, the spade suits him, and your cards have told true."

"He is a knave, sure enough, but not the knave of spades."

"They are all knaves—these men. I have been vexed likewise by Squire Hullett. He was the first who frightened me; and then followed Captain Davey. No, Davey did not succeed immediately; Samson Furze served as an interlude."

The old woman shook her head. "He comes into the story too often. I cannot keep him out."

"What, Samson?"

"Yes, the knave of spades. I see a trouble at hand. I have brought in a king of hearts."

"Pray who is he?"

"I cannot tell, but he and the knave of spades get across each other at every turn of the cards."

The old woman threw down the pack.

"What have you come here for?" she asked.

"I have come for your assistance, granny. These men—

knaves all—are in league at one moment, in opposition the next, to get from me this"—

She drew forth the packet of Josiah Thirkleby's "Revelations."

"Granny, the secret of my birth is here. Whether the secret of my future be there"—she touched the strewn cards with her foot—"that is less certain. These men, Hullett and Davey, threaten to drive me out of the Manor House, and they will do it. All that they want to get hold of is this package of papers and letters. It is not safe, and I have brought it to you that you may keep it for me well concealed."

"I will do that," said the old woman.

She rose slowly from her seat, went to a nook in the wall, and drew forth a large brown earthenware jar. It had a wide mouth.

"There," said she, "put them into thickey cloam pot and cork it up."

"And I must seal it. You will not mind? I have brought wax and my uncle's signet with 'J.T.' on it."

"Seal it up; that is vitty."

"And I shall put a label on the jar. *Allspice*."

CHAPTER XXII

NO RIGHTS

THE loss of her son weighed lightly on Mrs. Furze in comparison with the vexation entertained at his rejection by Georgie.

As to his enlistment, that was remediable. His father would purchase his discharge; but the wound to her vanity was felt poignantly. She had gone about the parish boasting of what would be done when Samson became lord of the manor, and she had enjoyed the feminine pleasure of ruffling the plumes of her neighbours, the wives of the farmers and yeomen of her acquaintance. She was aware, though unwilling to admit it herself, that her own conduct had given keenness and point to the annoyance. But, like a woman, she turned on her husband, and rated and abused him, with all the force of which she was capable, for having persuaded her, against her better judgment, to send Samson a-courting the parson's wench.

The yeoman bore this torrent of abuse with great composure. Custom had made him callous. She dreaded lest those whom she had exasperated by hints of assertion of manorial rights should turn on her with gratified resentment.

But Mrs. Furze was a woman of wit, and she immediately took measures to deflect the blow from herself.

No sooner had she ascertained that Samson had been rejected than she started on a round of visits in the parish, without a moment's delay, so as to be able to furnish the women of Wellcombe with her version of the story.

Georgina had indeed refused Samson, but in a manner that

threw slight on all the marriageable young men in the place, and in terms that insulted their mothers and sisters.

Mrs. Furze first of all imagined to herself what had been the feelings of Georgina, and then gave to them forcible, if coarse, expression.

"Oh no!" said the yeoman's wife. "She would not have my Samson 'or any vulgar lout out of Wellcombe.' She, with the parson's savings and with royal blood in her veins, scorned to speak with such bumpkins. She addressed Samson from a window, to show she stood on a higher level. 'Good Lord!' said she, 'conceive of me as daughter-in-law to the frumps and dowdies of the farmhouses here, and to be called sister by the blowsy trollops of the moor!'"

Mrs. Furze always had at command a pile of expletives, just as the primeval savages heaped up cairns of stones in their camps to hurl at besiegers.

Mrs. Furze was a skilful and observant woman, and she worked so ingeniously upon those to whom she communicated her story that they forgot their resentment against her to flare with anger against the "stuck-up, saucy minx—who was nothing after all but a mongrel"—who had disparaged their sons and daughters.

A chaise drew up at the door of the Manor House, and a gentleman in clerical dress stepped out and inquired if he might see Miss Thirkleby. He announced himself as the Reverend Henry Weldon, newly appointed Vicar of Wellcombe. He was a man of refined exterior, and with an earnest and kindly expression. Georgina was at once drawn towards him. He seemed to have stepped out of a different sphere from that in which she had moved.

"I have come," said he, after a salutation, "with an appeal to your charity. I come *in formâ pauperis*. I have been just inducted. Did you hear the church bell? But I find that my position is embarrassing. The late vicar let the parsonage house to some poor people, and I have been constrained to give them notice to vacate it, as, positively, I find no house here into which I could go. Of course, these poor souls must not be unduly hurried; and in the meanwhile I am out in the street. I do not

relish the idea of lodging at the public-house. I thought that possibly one of the churchwardens or farmers would have offered me a shakedown, but your people are somewhat suspicious and do not care to house me till they know of what stuff I am made. One churchwarden positively warned me off, if I were a highflier."

"That is their character," said Georgie; "they are jealous of strangers. Are you a West Countryman?"

"Alas! no; I have not that honour. I come from quite another part of England."

"Then they will regard you as their natural enemy."

"I must labour to gain their esteem. Now to the point. I am diffident in asking it, but I am in desperate straits. Could you, without inconvenience, extend to me just so much hospitality as to give me night shelter here for the Saturdays and Sundays till I can get into my parsonage? You do not know me, and yet I make bold to entreat you to do this for me. In fact, this is what both churchwardens advised, when I represented to them my houseless condition."

"Oh, I will willingly do that," said Georgina.

"I could take my meals at the inn," said the new vicar, "so as to give the least possible trouble, but I hesitate about making it my abode at night. I have had a hint that there is a noisy house there on Saturday evenings, and that the moral character of the host leaves much to be desired."

"You are heartily welcome here to a bed and to meals. As to Hamlin—I suppose what was said referred to Polly. My uncle thought nothing of that. Will you sit down and rest?"

"Directly. I will dismiss the chaise."

When Mr. Weldon returned, Georgie talked frankly with him. He was interested to hear all that she could tell him about the place and the people.

"How often did your uncle hold service?" he inquired.

"Sometimes twice on a Sunday, but only one sermon. If you would like to have his old ones, you are heartily welcome. They are of no use to anyone."

"Are there many communicants in the parish?"

"I think not any. There were three or four old women and one old man, when uncle gave away the sacrament money; but when he stopped that—they fell off."

"When was the last confirmation?"

"We never have one here."

"No, I suppose not; but in Ashburton? How many candidates were mustered last time?"

"Uncle said he was not legally compelled; but just to please the bishop, he gave a dozen young lads and lasses a shilling each to go in."

The new vicar said nothing, but looked down.

"I beg your pardon, sir," said the girl. "Shall you have the chaplaincy of Prince Town as well? That is three hundred a year, and this is only two hundred."

"I have heard nothing about it. The appointment is with the duchy. Is it not a long way off, and over wild moors, to Prince Town?"

"Oh, a long way, but you need not go there. Uncle rarely went."

"But the duty?"

"He paid a curate seventy pounds, and so pocketed two hundred and thirty."

"Are there many sick in the place, Miss Thirkleby?"

"This is a very healthy parish, on account of the pure water and mountain air. If there be a case of sickness—but that is rarely—half a crown and a bottle of port suffice."

"But the sick must be visited."

"Uncle never did—perhaps the case might be infectious; anyhow, the room stuffy. These people do not open their windows."

"Surely they need some spiritual ministrations?"

"Oh no! They are satisfied with the port. If it be a long sickness, perhaps a second bottle."

"Did the bishop never interfere, because the services were so few, and there were no communicants, and the confirmation candidates had no preparation?"

"Oh dear, no! My uncle gave the bishop no annoyance. Indeed, I believe the bishop thought very highly of my uncle, because he did nothing and so gave no offence, and

taught nothing, and so there was no bother about doctrine. My uncle was sure of preferment."

The new vicar said nothing, but his countenance expressed uneasiness.

Presently, when the silence was becoming irksome, he said, "Excuse my putting to you a delicate question. I did ask the churchwarden, but could get no response from him further than that he was no highflier. I wanted to know what had been your uncle's religious opinions, or, to be more exact, convictions."

"Opinions! I am not certain that he had any. As to convictions, I am certain he had none. Mr. Weldon, I am sure you will find your position here as vicar very easy."

"On the contrary, young lady," said the new parson, with sadness in his tone, "I begin to see that it is likely to be peculiarly difficult. And now, thanking you most cordially, I will return to my carriage—a hired chaise from the Red Lion at Ashburton. I sent the driver with it to the tavern. My brother-in-law is with it—Sir John Chevalier. He drove over with me to look at the place, and I suspect is now sauntering in the churchyard."

Georgie accompanied the vicar to the door. As she opened it to let him out, Hullett and Davey thrust in, somewhat rudely.

"I am not going to receive you, gentlemen," said the girl.

"Oh, that is very fine," said Hullett. "But first you must show that you have a right to exclude us: I am a Justice of the Peace. You have produced no evidence that you have a particle of right to this house. I intervene on behalf of the Crown."

"Nay," broke in Davey, "not yet, Hullett. You are premature. My relative is a Thirkleby, and has made application at the Consistory Court for letters of administration."

"I shall put in a caveat for the Crown," said Hullett.

"I have got authority from my cousin to act for him," protested Davey. "The Crown can claim only where there is no heir."

"Come," said Hullett. "We two must pull together. We are here to take possession of the Manor House and of its

contents, and to inventory everything within it, and we shall allow nothing, not even a scrap of paper, to be removed till it be decided as to who is the legal heir to the estate of the late lamented vicar."

"I beg your pardon, gentlemen," said Mr. Weldon. "This young lady is in possession; you must show your right to dispossess her."

"I am a magistrate," blustered Hullett. "I am a representative of the Crown. I insist on her leaving the place, and leaving it at once. I think, Davey, that we may permit her to remove what is demonstrably her private property, and we may allow her a reasonable sum of money, sufficient for immediate necessities. What say you, Davey? Ten pounds?"

"A little more than that—say twenty guineas," said the captain. "I am authorised by my cousin to deal fairly by her. But she must vacate the premises without delay."

"Immediately," exclaimed Hullett, "so that there be no surreptitious appropriation of important documents. That was to be guarded against. Eh, Davey?"

"Certainly," acquiesced the captain. "Yet—I do not want to be hard on her. Even now, if she will allow us to take charge of the manuscript of which she knows, and of which we are in quest, and further, allow us to make an inventory of all the valuables in this house, we would waive our right to require her quit the house."

"Just so," said the squire. "You see, Miss Georgie, we have not the smallest desire to be strict. But we must guarantee the rights of others, and we must be sure that there will be no getting rid of documents—documents, you understand, of no specific value—of none whatever to you—but of importance as compromising the character of other persons."

"And if I refuse to go?"

"We should have to summon the constable and expel you by force. It has got wind that you have no right to the place, and are to be ejected. Look into the road. It is full of people. There are plenty present who will uphold the majesty of the law as centred in myself. I shall call the constable if you offer the least resistance."

"Miss Thirkleby," said the new vicar, "instead of my becoming your guest, you will have to become mine. And as you heartily offered me the shelter of your roof, so now heartily do I offer you my protection. My wife is at Ashburton, and we will do all in our power to assist you. I am unhappily not lawyer enough to know whether these gentlemen are acting legally. My impression is that the magistrate is proceeding in a manner that cannot be justified. Under the circumstances, however, you must yield under protest. Will you accept my offer?"

"Heartily," said Georgie, when she had looked into the road and seen the crowd.

She was pale, quivering, not with fear, but with anger.

"Mr. Weldon," she said, and gave her hand, "I will go with you."

CHAPTER XXIII

A MALEDICTION

"I SAY, Hullett, did you see how she looked at us?" asked Davey, when Georgina had gone upstairs to put together such things as she needed.

"Yes, had she a knife handy, she would have driven it into us," said the Squire of Stannon.

It had been arranged that the girl was to collect and carry away such articles as she would need, and that the major portion of her wardrobe and other possessions should be sent into Ashburton by the carrier.

But Hullett had said to her, as she turned to mount the stair, that she must not lock the trunk, as they considered themselves responsible that nothing but her own personal property should be removed from the house.

"Gentlemen," said Mr. Weldon, "I am not acquainted with the circumstances. Why you should act in this manner is to me inexplicable. On the surface, your proceeding bears the appearance of being an act of wanton barbarity, and altogether unworthy of your character and position. This unhappy girl has no home, and you two men, one a magistrate, are turning her into the road. All I can say is that I thank the Almighty for sending me here so opportunely, that I might offer her the shelter refused by you."

"You are mistaken, sir," said Hullett. "We have no desire to treat her unfairly or unkindly. But there are particulars, too long to be gone into, that make our adoption of extreme measures a moral necessity."

"Quite so," threw in Davey. "I am ready to swear to that."

"But you will see, sir," proceeded the squire, "she will not allow matters to reach such a pass. She is incensed because we have driven her into a corner. I may say that, but for your arrival and offer, we should have been certain, absolutely certain, of success. Nevertheless, I do not doubt that at the last moment she will surrender; with a bad grace, perchance, and we will build her a golden bridge by which to retreat."

"I confess this looks to me like bullying a defenceless girl. Your reasons I cannot fathom."

"Sir, I am a Justice of the Peace," said Hullett, drawing himself up; "your words are offensive. You presume on the liberty accorded the cloth."

"He is on the Commission, I swear it," interjected Davey.

"However, sir, I will condescend to enlighten you. This young lady has possessed herself of a document to which she has absolutely no right, and which seriously affects the characters of persons now alive, and occupying the highest positions in the land—of one, sir, between ourselves I say it—of the very highest. This document must be got from her. It is painful to us to act as we do, but necessity knows no law."

"If you will fully acquaint me with the facts," said Mr. Weldon, "I will endeavour to get the matter settled in a less violent manner."

"Sir," said Hullett, "it is too late. She has been given many chances. Both Mr. Davey and I have spoken to her with great gentleness; and have represented to her the gravity of the situation, and have gone down on our knees to her, to induce her to surrender this bundle of papers. You will see, sir, at the last moment she will yield—ah! here she comes. Miss Georgie, you have your little collection of indispensables with you. A modest one, I suppose. That you have well considered. We do not desire to eject you. Surrender the papers, and you remain."

"I am ready," said the girl, slightly bowing to the vicar, and ignoring the presence of the squire, who addressed her.

"Do you mean, miss, that you are bent on leaving?" asked the captain. "We did not intend to thrust you forth, if you would be reasonable and come to terms."

"I am at your service, Mr. Weldon," said Georgie, ignoring Davey as she had ignored Hullett. Her face was pale, save for two carnation spots on her cheeks. Her brows were knit and her lips set.

The two conspirators looked at each other. Hullett shrugged his shoulders.

"If you will but surrender," said the captain, "we are most willing to come to terms."

"We will wink our eyes at every other irregularity," said Hullett.

Georgina put her hand on Mr. Weldon's arm, and he conducted her to the doorstep.

The road was thronged with villagers, gathered from every side. Many had been previously collected to witness the induction of the new vicar, and to gather a presage as to the length of his stay among them from the number of strokes on the bell when he touched the rope.

But a rumour had got about that Georgina Thirkleby was to be ejected from the Manor House, and this had collected four times as many persons as had curiosity to see the induction. Men had deserted their field labour to see this. The blacksmith had left his anvil, the wright his wheel. Women hastened from their domestic work. Hamlin's Polly, with tucked-up apron, was there. So was Mrs. Furze. Elderly women, wives and mothers, had congregated, so had the young girls. The females had triumph written in their faces. Whatever kindly feeling they would otherwise have entertained towards Georgie was banished by the malicious words of Susan Furze, who had filled their hearts with gall towards the unhappy and innocent girl.

Georgie looked about her, and saw by the expression of the countenances that she had not a friend amidst the crowd.

She was too proud, too angry to care much for that; but her indignation was given one final prod, that provoked her to an act of indiscretion. Just as she left the doorstep to pass down the gravel walk, she let go her hold on the vicar's arm, turned upon Hullett and Davey, standing in the doorway, and said in ringing tones—

"That which you seek is not in the house; you will never find it!"

"She is taking it away with her!" gasped Davey.

"Stay her! she has stolen something! Stay her in the king's name!" shouted Hullett.

"She has been stealing," yelled someone in the crowd. "Stop her! Stop the thief!"

"Hold her—till she is searched!" cried Hullett.

"Hey, the trollop! the brazen-faced wench! The mongrel who boasts of her royal blood—royal!—caught thieving! Hey! thief! thief!"

The yells came wholly from the women.

The vicar turned himself about.

"Sir," said he, addressing the magistrate, "what has she taken? Show me that you have a right to detain her."

"I am not accountable to you, sir!" roared Hullett. "And let me tell you this is a bad beginning here. We won't be priest-ridden."

He made for the girl.

He was not allowed to lay hands on her, for at that moment a young officer thrust his way through the villagers. He was in military undress.

"Now, sir," said he, checking Hullett with uplifted hand. "Touch that girl or the parson at your peril."

"I am a magistrate," said Hullett; "I charge her with having taken something out of the house."

"I also am in His Majesty's service," said the young man; "not only a soldier, but I am as well a Justice. Neither you nor a soul here shall touch her."

"One moment," said the vicar. "From whom do you assert that she has taken something?"

Hullett was silent.

"A thing cannot be said to be stolen unless carried off from the legitimate owner. To whom does this article belong legitimately?"

"I demand it on behalf of the heir to the estate," said Davey.

"And I on behalf of the Crown in default of heirs," exclaimed Hullett.

"I claim it because solemnly committed to me by my uncle," said Georgie. "It is a bundle of papers that they want."

"Have you got them with you?" asked the vicar.

"No, I have not got them with me, but I know where they are, and *they*"— she pointed to Hullett and Davey, "they shall never have them."

"You hear," said the vicar, "she has not got these documents about her. Whether you have a right to them remains to be shown. That is a matter to be decided in a court of law, and not by violent methods such as you have adopted. Now, John," he addressed the young man, "we will enter the carriage. I told the driver to put to."

The crowd was tossing, muttering, breaking into spurts of exclamation.

"Good people," said the vicar, speaking loudly, "be kind enough to stand aside. This young lady places herself under my protection. Certain legal questions that concern neither you nor me have to be gone into—rights of property, I believe. Till these have been threshed out by lawyers, it is convenient that she leave Wellcombe."

"We don't want her here! Turn her out! she's a thief! She calls herself Royal Georgie, but she's no better than us hussies and trollops, as she calls us!" rose in shrill cries.

"And us she calls frowsy old frumps!" came in harsher tones; "anyways, we be honest women, and that's more than ever was her mother."

"She's one who shoots at young men and tries to kill 'em," cried Mrs. Furze.

"And she spits on them—she do despise 'em so—out of the winder!" called another.

"Bumpkins, Colin Clouts, Boobies! them is the names she gives to our sons," cried a third.

The men remained inert, with their hands in their pockets, some lounging in the hedge, laughing at the excitement of the women, themselves not displeased to see the girl who had flouted them driven out of the parish, but by no means disposed to take an active part in the expulsion.

The young officer looked about from side to side, and behind him, eager to catch some youth sharing in the clamour, that he might chastise him; but the lads remained silent. They giggled or laughed out loud.

Then a tramp of horses was audible, and the mob separated to allow the landau to drive up. The post-boy cracked his whip, and lashed here and there to clear the way. Some of the young girls, screaming, thrust themselves into the hedge, not altogether unmindful that the lads were there to receive them.

Seeing the vicar and the officer, the post-boy drew up.

Then Sir John Chevalier opened the door and let down the steps.

"Enter, Miss Thirkleby!" said the vicar, and handed the girl into the carriage. He followed, and the young man leaped after him, and stooped to fasten the door.

At once the cries arose again. "Oh, how proud she be! The Blood Royal in a chaise! But she is a thief all the same, and a bastard to boot!"

The vicar arose to sign to the post-boy to go forward, when his arm was caught by Georgie. She stood up, fire flashing from her dark eyes, her entire frame trembling with passion. The last insult had maddened her past control. Facing the mob she flung at them these words:—

"I leave with you my deadliest, deepest malediction! May your cattle die of murrain, and the mildew take your crops! May your substance waste and your ricks take fire! May your children be sickly and never thrive! May fevers fire your blood, and cramps and aches knot your muscles and settle into your bones! May"—

"For God's sake!" cried the horrified vicar, seizing her and

drawing her down on the seat, "for God's sake do not utter another word! Are you mad, or wicked?"

The carriage was in motion.

The young officer looking back saw the crowd silent, shrinking away, their faces blank with terror.

CHAPTER XXIV

A DRIVE

NO one spoke as the carriage rattled over the road, where comparatively level, and then crawled up the steep ascent.

The crowd had been left behind, to disperse with misgivings at heart and anticipations of disaster. Occasional foot-passengers were passed at long intervals; sheep had to be roused from the road on which they couched, and cattle to be driven in stupid tumult, getting in the way of the horses for half a mile before they could be induced to escape by a side avenue.

Georgie was quivering with emotion, her eyes gleamed, but with the after-flush of a receding thunderstorm. Burning spots were in her cheeks, but the lips that had turned purple resumed their healthier colour.

It was bad that she should be expelled from the house where she had spent so many years; it was worse that this should be done with the applause of the villagers. It was worst of all that this ignominious ejection should be witnessed, the insolent and gross expletives cast at her should be heard, by these strangers who had extended their arms to protect her.

Indignation, disgust, resentment, mortified self-respect seethed in her bosom. Her head whirled, her heart bounded as though she had been running up Rowdon.

The two gentlemen in the carriage sympathised with her distress, respected the condition she was in, and were silent, not vexing her with officious civilities. Were she to attempt to

speak, she would break down into a convulsion of tears. She was obviously exercising control over herself to prevent this. She desired to appear indifferent. Sobs would have betrayed how keenly she felt what had taken place and how great was her humiliation.

After a while, the vicar and his brother-in-law began a conversation in a low tone on indifferent matters.

Georgie heard their voices, but could not follow what was said. She was too deeply wounded, and her thoughts too fully occupied, for her to care to listen to what was said.

In her trouble, but a single comfort remained to her, to which she could turn—that the manuscript of her uncle, with its appendix of letters so intimately affecting herself, was beyond the reach of Hullett and Davey.

On Alse Grylls she could rely. The old woman would never surrender what had been confided to her; and Georgie was confident that it would never occur to her persecutors that she had placed the packet where it was.

She thought of these men searching every corner of the Manor House, and of their disappointment in nowhere finding that of which they were in quest. Such a thought served but as a transient diversion to the prevailing distress of mind.

What must Mr. Weldon and Sir John Chevalier think of her? What else could they consider her but as a most disagreeable personage, who could draw down upon herself the concentrated hatred of an entire parish? How could they respect one whom those despised who had known her for many years?

The injustice of her treatment rankled in her heart. She had been accused of having cast ugly epithets at the matrons and maids of Wellcombe, and of using contemptuous expressions to designate the lads. It was not true; she had never done so. The very terms hurled after her were calculated to lower her in the eyes of her protectors. They would not, indeed, hold that she was a vulgar thief, but there was another expression employed that she was incapable of rebutting.

What had she done to arouse this storm of bad feeling and ill manners? It was true that she had shot Samson; but it

was also true that this was known, and admitted to have been, the result of an accident. It was true that she had refused Samson; but surely the parish was not to dictate to a girl whom she was to take as her mate. It was true that she had dismissed him somewhat curtly—perhaps in a manner offensive to his pride; but she had previously warned him that on no account would she accept his offer. And his visit was inopportunely timed, when she was tingling with resentment at the intrusion and impertinence of Hullett.

It was true that, in dudgeon, Samson had left his home and had enlisted. But for this only himself and his mother were to blame, who had made such parade of his intentions that, when he failed, he had not heart to face the mockery of his comrades.

As a child she had met and played with the urchins and girls of Wellcombe, but when she had become a woman she had withdrawn from the association as much as possible. She had not gone out of her way to cultivate the acquaintance of their mothers, the yeomen's wives of Wellcombe. She had not visited the sick, but her uncle had not done so. She had taken her cue from him. He was popular and respected, yet she was the reverse. How was this to be accounted for?

She failed to see that his popularity was based on his neglect of his duty, and her unpopularity was due to her not having made it her duty to cultivate the society of the parishioners on a footing of equality. Then other considerations pressed upon her.

She asked herself, What was she to do? Whither could she go? With self-respect it was not possible for her to inflict herself upon the new vicar for long. As soon as possible he would go into residence in Wellcombe, and to Wellcombe she would never return. No! she would sooner die. Her eye kindled again, a quiver of emotion thrilled through her members, her lips tightened, and her brows contracted. Hard lines formed in her pallid face. No! rather than that she would do anything, go into service, even destroy herself.

What was life to her? It had no pleasures, it contained no pleasant possibilities. She had not been afforded a fair start,

such as is given to other girls. The past hung upon her as a weight and crushed hope out of her heart.

She might remain a few days under the protection of Mr. and Mrs. Weldon. They were lodging at an inn, and to this inn he was conducting her. Out of his slenderly furnished purse he would have to pay for her board and lodging. She had no right to lay on him this pecuniary burden. She would not accept his hospitality for longer than three or four days, during which to resolve on her future course.

Not unintentionally, with a tinge of feminine malice, Georgina had brought the keys with her, the keys that unlocked the chest containing the case with her bank-notes, the attic where was the plate, the bureau and the drawers in which were the papers of her uncle. She had done more—she had readjusted the drum-lock to the word F A R O, and had thereby shut in the bank-notes, and made them inaccessible. If Hullett and Davey were resolved on ransacking the house, let them break the locks, and if so—take the consequence.

Suddenly, Sir John Chevalier said to his brother-in-law, "She is ill."

The poor girl, overcome by the tension of her nerves, the trouble in her brain, had turned deadly white, and seemed about to sink.

Mr. Weldon at once caught and sustained her. "I have a drop of brandy with me," said he; "I entreat you to take it."

She shook her head.

"What can you think of me? You can think of me evil only!" she gasped.

"Young lady," answered the parson, "we think only that you have been misunderstood."

"My head is on fire and my heart is sick," she said. "I entreat you, take no notice of me. I am not so wicked, so vile, as they say—as you have been led to suppose."

"My child," said the vicar, "you are unhappy, for you have been barbarously treated. Be comforted, you are with such as entertain towards you only pity and regard, and we will leave no stone unturned to obtain redress for your wrongs."

"You can do nothing for me in that way," she said, after

a pause. "It is quite true, everything is gone from me. My uncle left no will, and I have a right to nothing."

"As to your future," said the parson, "do not be discouraged. God will provide. He sent me to you in your hour of distress, and I take that as a mission from Him which I may not disregard. Lay your head back on the cushions of the carriage and try to sleep."

She made a slight dissentient notion.

"Turn your thoughts away from these matters that fret you. Best of all, cast thy burden upon the Lord, and He will sustain thee. So will you find ease of mind and rest to a troubled heart."

This was language so unlike any she had hitherto heard, that it was incomprehensible to her.

However, she leaned back and closed her eyes.

The vicar and his brother-in-law resumed their conversation.

Sir John Chevalier was a baronet. His sister Lucy, his only sister, was married to the Reverend Henry Weldon when he was a curate. She was many years older than her brother.

The late baronet had been a gallant soldier and had fallen early in the Peninsular war. The blow had been more than Lady Chevalier could bear. Naturally delicate, she had sunk, and had left her children to the care of their aunt, Miss Chevalier, who lived in Exeter, a lady very comfortably off, who idolised her nephew.

He was a fine young man, honourable and true, with a pleasant, open countenance, and his aunt had reason for thinking highly of him. He had succeeded to the baronetcy whilst still young, had a fair estate, but by no means large, was well built and well educated. He had, happily, not been spoiled.

He was in a cavalry regiment, and was now paying a hasty visit to his brother-in-law, eager to see what the cure was like to which Mr. Weldon had been promoted through the influence of Miss Chevalier with the dean and chapter. He trusted often to stay with his sister and brother-in-law when able to leave his regiment for a few days.

As Georgie's eyes closed he allowed himself to observe her.

Hitherto he had hardly permitted himself more than a hasty glance. He was struck with the fineness of her features and the richness of the dark hair that framed the pale face. The hot colour was still perceptible in her cheeks, but fading, and it passed into flushes across her brow. The closed eyelids were dark, and at intervals they vibrated, and the hands clutched convulsively.

Presently the post-boy drew his horses to the left, and the landau made room for a light buggy, in which sat an elderly gentleman dressed in the height of fashion, with a beaver the brim curled, a perfectly fitting overcoat with velvet collar, high shirt collars, and a belcher.

This gentleman looked at those who were in the carriage, started, and put his hand on the rein, but was too late to arrest the driver in time to speak with those he passed, as was his apparent intention. The young baronet saw the gentleman stand up in his trap, turn round, and adjust his gold-rimmed eyeglass.

"Who can that person be?" asked Sir John. "He seems vastly interested in us." Then calling to the post-boy, he put the question to him.

"That, sir, is Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt," answered the boy, with his head over his shoulder.

Georgina opened her eyes at the name, and sat up.

"Where is he? Why did you mention him?"

"He has just gone by," was the reply. "Is it your wish to speak with him?"

"No—but I am glad that he has returned." Then she sank back on the cushions.

Sir John standing up called to the post-boy—

"And who the dickens is Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt?"

"Sir Thomas, sir! Oh, he's a great man, a very great man. He is Warden of the Stannaries and Steward of the Duchy."

Mr. Weldon took Georgie's hand.

"It is burning," he said; "you are in a high fever."

"My head is aching," she replied, "I cannot hold it up. I wonder whether Sir Thomas is going direct to Prince Town, or whether he will take Wellcombe on his way, and if so, what he will say to Hullett and Davey."

As he drove along, Sir Thomas said to himself, "How strange! That was assuredly Georgina Thirkleby in black, and looking like a corpse. In a carriage with strange gentlemen, too, and one a parson!"

Then he said aloud to the driver, "Bill, who were those who passed us just now?"

"That was the landau from the Lion," replied the man. "And I think I heard say as how the new vicar to Wellcombe was staying there, and had hired the conveyance for the day."

"The new vicar!—what the deuce do you mean?"

"Do you not know, sir, that Parson Thirkleby is dead and buried?"

"Dead and buried!" echoed the knight. "Good heavens!" He looked blankly, irresolutely before him. "Confound me, that I was away! What may have happened?"

He put his hand on the reins, and the driver stayed the horse.

"One moment!" said Sir Thomas. "Let me consider." Then recovering himself, "Drive immediately to the Manor House, Wellcombe."

CHAPTER XXV

MARCHEZ!

"WE are rather awkwardly placed, are we not?" asked Davey.

"I rather think you are so, old cock," replied Hullett.

The two men stood looking at each other in perplexity.

"Everything is locked," said Davey. "Are we to force open box and bureau? It does not look quite—quite right, you see."

"As you have entered into this job, I presume you will have to go through with it," observed the squire.

"But what is the good, if she has carried away with her that particular article of which we are in search?" asked the captain.

"You are not disposed to embezzle the notes and plate, I presume?" inquired Hullett drily.

"Embezzle, sir!"

"I mean lay your hand on them on behalf of your cousin, the heir-at-law."

"Well, there now," responded the captain, with a crest-fallen look, "in point of fact I begin to doubt the relationship. You see my people have no *h* or *e* in the name. They are Thirlbys, not Thirklebys."

"You said, you hoary impostor, that your cousin had taken out letters of administration."

"No, it was you who said that, improving on my statement. I said that he was considering about it."

"So! there is no heir-at-law at all?"

"I cannot say. My people may have dropped their *h's* just

as others slip their *h's*. But I came here to see you escheat for the Crown."

"With your confounded drink," said Hullett, "you have muddled everything. What is the advantage of our being here, in possession, if the 'Revelations' have been spirited out of the place. I won't touch the plate or the notes."

"We may as well search for the manuscript. She was bluffing us, maybe."

"I hold she has taken it with her."

"I do not, or why should she have locked every drawer and closet and chest?"

"Lest we should take away the valuables."

"But they are only in the chest and attic."

"It is all due to your confounded drinking, Davey. You ought to have known that the parson was to be inducted to-day."

"How was I to know? I am not an archdeacon or a churchwarden."

"What is to be done?" inquired Hullett, biting his thumb. "I don't like breaking open doors and prising locks. It does not look well in a Justice of the Peace. Besides, where's the good if she has carried off the papers?"

"We may as well look, now we are here. Let us call in the constable, and say we are taking an inventory."

"I don't like it. He may say—seal everything."

Again Hullett was silent.

"I have a bundle of keys in my pocket," said the captain, "and perchance some may fit."

"There is a great deal of money here, and no one but Moses on guard. Through your tipsy talk at the tavern, it is all over the parish and neighbourhood that money and valuables are heaped up here. It is all a muddle because you are a sot—excuse the word. If you had not soaked till your wits were out you would have learned and remembered that the new vicar was to be instituted to-day, and that it would not be a suitable moment for us to make the attempt. It will not do to leave all the notes here. Their numbers must be taken. I will tell you what we will do. Send for the constable and blacksmith, and I will authorise the latter

to pick the locks if you will give me, in your hand, a written statement, that you have a relative claiming the estate."

"I don't know. We are weak in a *k*. But, look here, let us try my bunch of keys first."

"There is no harm in that, but I am convinced, that spitting cat has carried the manuscript away with her."

"We may as well make sure. If it be anywhere, it is in the iron box."

"Then try your keys," said Hullett.

"My hand shakes. I will give you the bunch."

"Thank you. I have sprained my wrist."

Davey, grumbling, knelt on the floor by the chest, and actually found a key that unlocked it.

"By George! here is the iron box," said he.

"Yes, and fast. Look! We knew it was open, and she must be aware what the word is that shuts and uncloses the lock, for now it is fast."

"What is to be done? Shall we smash the lock?"

"You may do it whilst I look out of the window."

The door opened and Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt entered.

"Gentlemen! What brings you here? What are you about?"

Davey started to his feet, and Hullett drew back in confusion.

"How is this, gentlemen? Has Miss Thirkleby gone and left you in possession, and authorised you to ransack the boxes?"

"That's just it, Tyrwhitt," said the squire, recovering, "she has not a foot to stand on. You see there is no will—not a shred of one. She was good enough to ask my friend Davey and me to search for one—but there is none to be found. And as that is the case, and she has no right to be here, or to what Mr. Thirkleby has left of personal estate, she has very judiciously, and in rare good feeling—withdrawn. My friend Davey has a cousin whom he holds to be the nearest of kin."

"No Hullett! You came here to seize — because the estate escheated to the Crown."

"It has perhaps not occurred to you, gentlemen," said Sir

Thomas stiffly, "that the manor may have been purchased by trustees on behalf of the young lady?"

Hullett's face fell. Davey stared stupidly at the speaker.

"I have the best reason for knowing that it is so, as I am the surviving trustee; Mr. Thirkleby was the other. Consequently this house is hers, and its contents are hers till you or someone else can make good a claim to the personal estate of the deceased vicar. Now, gentlemen, what have you to say to that?"

"We acted as we supposed right. We did not drive Miss Georgie away. We are now only endeavouring to safeguard the property that remains. She went because she thought she had no right to be here, and she was mightily taken with the new vicar, or the young officer who accompanied him."

"It was so, I will swear to it," threw in the captain.

"I believe I can satisfy you that the manor and house belong to Miss Thirkleby. So, gentlemen, perhaps you will ride after her and advise her to return."

"My horse is bad in the wind," said Hullett.

"And mine has a splint," said Davey.

Hullett looked at the captain. "I think, Davey, that you no longer need my assistance. Under the circumstances, your cousin will withdraw his claim to the real estate, but perhaps proceed with that to the personal estate. I wish you had made inquiries beforehand, and not dragged me, a magistrate, into this matter."

"And perhaps now, squire, you will abandon all thought of the property escheating to the Crown?"

"I wish you good-day, gentlemen. Davey, as you unlocked that chest, be so good as to lock it again and then decamp."

"I remain your most obedient servant," said Hullett, withdrawing.

"And I, sir," said Davey, scrambling to his feet after having locked the box. "I, sir, am yours to command."

CHAPTER XXVI

AT THE RED LION

ON the morrow, during the forenoon, a card was presented to the Reverend Henry Weldon, that bore on it the name of Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt.

"Show the gentleman up," said the parson.

Next moment the knight entered, bowing first profoundly to Mrs. Weldon and then to the vicar. Sir Thomas was a well-preserved man. His hair was perhaps extraordinarily dark for his age, as might be judged by the lines in his face. His whiskers, cut short before reaching the chin, were elaborately curled. He wore a bottle-green coat with brass buttons, a check waistcoat, and trousers that were tight from the knee downwards, and slit at the bottom to overlap his boots.

There was undoubted artificiality in his address, in his appearance, in his attitudes, and yet through all peered kindliness and genuine courtesy.

"I allow myself to call at an unprecedented hour, madam," said he, again bowing, "only because the occasion is unprecedented. I have ventured here to inquire after the health of Miss Thirkleby, a very old friend of mine, one whom I left blooming as a spring rose in the house of her uncle, and whom I catch a glimpse of, on my return, looking like a broken lily, and learn that she is bereft of her uncle, and would be homeless had not you, madam, and you, reverend sir, most kindly taken compassion on her."

"I am sorry to inform you, sir," said the lady, a gentle, sweet person, "I regret to tell you, that Miss Thirkleby is unwell. She has undergone a great strain, and the doctor,

who was here last night, and whom we expect this morning, says that she is suffering from nervous fever."

"I trust she is in no danger," said Sir Thomas anxiously.

"I also trust not," replied the lady. "Will you not take a chair, Sir Thomas?"

"You are very kind. In one moment." The knight turned to the vicar. "My dear sir, I live at Prince's Hall, on Dartmoor, and am Warden of the Stannaries — which, perhaps, sounds an empty title to one who does not belong to the West. I was intimate with the Reverend Josiah Thirkleby, I may even say, I was very intimate with him. I had known him for a good many years before he came into this wilderness. His death is to me a shock, and I shall feel his loss. He was vastly respected."

"From what I hear," responded Mr. Weldon, "he was a man who gave offence to no one."

"That is true. He was a scholar, a man of excellent parts, of unexceptionable breeding, and of rare tact. He was one who never touched a raw."

"Tact is a rare and precious gift. But wounds surely ought not always to be left alone."

"To pass to another topic," said the knight. "Miss Thirkleby is with you. You must pardon me if I cannot understand the circumstances. The account I have heard has been confused and contradictory. Of your goodness and consideration I have no shadow of doubt; but I marvel at her being induced to leave her home to accompany you. It demonstrates perfect tact on your part to at once win her confidence," and Sir Thomas made a bow to Mr. Weldon and then to the lady. He now said, "Allow me," and took a chair, arranging his coat-tails so as not to sit on them, and drawing up his trousers so as not to form bulges at the knee.

"She could not well help herself, poor girl," answered the vicar; "she was ejected from the house, and had I not been on the spot she would have been left homeless in the road."

"Kindly tell me the circumstances. When I reached Wellcombe yesterday I found two officious personages in

possession at the Manor House, but could extract little information from them."

"You shall have the story in three words," said Mr. Weldon. "Perhaps you are aware that my predecessor had turned the vicarage into cottages? When I arrived I found that I had no parsonage into which to go, and that I should be constrained to take up my residence temporarily at Ashburton. I could not turn the occupants summarily out of the vicarage. I had to give them reasonable time to clear out and find new homes. My difficulty then was, what to do about sleeping accommodation when I went to Wellcombe to do duty. The road from Ashburton is long and infinitely arduous. I really think I could not face it both ways on a Sunday in winter. For reasons wherewith I need not trouble you, I did not desire to stay at the village inn. In my difficulty I threw myself on the hospitality of Miss Thirkleby. She was prepared at once, most generously, to receive me. But it so fell out, providentially, that I was at her house when two gentlemen arrived, one of whom was a magistrate, to inform her that she had no right to the house, and that they were constrained regretfully to make her quit it, so that they might take charge of it on behalf of the true heir. At least, that is how I understood it, but the entire proceeding, and their conduct, impressed me with distrust."

"I can set your mind at rest," said Sir Thomas. "That house is hers. When purchased with certain monies to be disposed of for her advantage, it was conveyed in trust for her to Mr. Thirkleby, her uncle, and to myself. I have made the intruders quit the premises. The Manor House belongs to Miss Thirkleby. I only wish that more land went with it. The estate is very small. The manorial rights are valueless. As to Mr. Thirkleby's personal property, that possibly may go to some heir, but to whom we do not know, as he left no will. Of course, no bank will surrender any deposit there till the legal rights as to the succession are established, but I really have no idea whether the late vicar kept a banking account. As to any immediate expenses that may be incurred by Miss Thirkleby, there need be no concern. I will stand responsible. I am trustee for her property."

"These little matters can be gone into later," said Mr. Weldon, "when she has recovered. She is really ill now, upset at being so ignominiously driven from her home, and, above all, perhaps, by the painful scene that attended it. Somehow or other, by some inadvertence, she had offended the parishioners of Wellcombe. There is no love lost between them."

"I do not understand this."

"Nor do I. Perhaps she will explain later. We cannot ask her concerning it now."

"I am sorry for this, as she will have to return to Wellcombe."

"That she will never do. She has been wounded too deeply, and I think it would be most unadvisable to enforce it. At present it is her one idea, to which she reverts with vehemence, both when delirious and when her brain is clear."

"What can be done?" exclaimed Sir Thomas. "I, who have known her since her earliest childhood, feel a responsibility for her, and could not allow her far from my sight. I am sure that her relations, if she has any, and myself, owe to you, madam, and to you, reverend sir, a debt of gratitude not easily discharged. I need hardly say that the Manor House is at your disposal, to reside in till the parsonage is made habitable to receive you. Indeed, it will be a relief to my mind that someone responsible should be in the place. Perhaps, when you are there—you, who have so completely won her confidence—her repugnance to a return to Wellcombe may fade away."

Sir Thomas rose and bowed, dropped his coat-tails gracefully, and smoothed down his trousers over the knee.

"I feel I have shockingly trespassed on your valuable time," he said, retreating towards the door, and bowing; then, as though recollecting himself, he took a step forward again, and said, "By the way, if you will permit me another word. You will inevitably hear strange stories relative to Miss Thirkleby. Pardon me, madam, if I say it, but you will be told that she is of the blood royal — that is to say, that His Gracious Majesty, the king, is her father. Such is the common talk.

It is not for me to affirm that this is true or to deny it. What I am sure of is, that nothing was heard of this scandal till comparatively recently. How it got into folks' mouths I cannot say. Assuredly not from her uncle. Some wild bloods and town bucks, who were staying with me or at Stannon, may have set the ball a-rolling—I cannot say. Or some fancied resemblance may have been traced between her and His Most Gracious Majesty when Prince of Wales. Again, I cannot say. You will be assured most positively of the relationship. But such as are most positive in assertion are always the least justified in making it."

"That is the case," said the vicar. "But remember, also, that he who drops the curtain is the man who stands behind the scenes."

Sir Thomas's mouth twitched.

"I have not humoured the whim. I have remained neutral, I know nothing—that is to say, officially I can say nothing. If"— He checked himself, and again made for the door. But once more he turned and advanced into the room. "I am ashamed to again trouble you," he said, "but there is a matter of certain papers that must be mentioned. Are you aware whether she has brought away with her a bundle in a brown cover, bound with red tape and sealed?"

"I am sure there is none," said Mrs. Weldon. "If there had been I think I should have seen it."

"I thank you a thousand times. I will intrude no longer."

As Sir Thomas finally withdrew he nearly stumbled over Sir John Chevalier, who was entering. Both retreated and apologised.

The vicar seized the occasion to introduce his brother-in-law to the Warden of the Stannaries. This occupied a few minutes, as certain compliments had to be bandied from side to side.

Then Sir Thomas left the room and descended the stairs.

On the doorstep of the Red Lion, that looks on the Exeter

road, he saw Alse Grylls seated with the cards, which she was sorting in her lap.

"Why, grannie! what brings you here?" he inquired, in a kindly tone.

"Ah, sir! how can you ask, when my darling is ill. They drove her out of Wellcombe, as though she had been a mad dog. Shame! Shame to 'em! I know who urged 'em on, and let them expect trouble."

"Did you walk into Ashburton?"

"Yes, sir, and I shall not return till I have seen her—not if I sit here day and night."

"And, whilst waiting, play patience?"

"Sir?"

"I mean a little game of cards with yourself."

"No, sir, it does not concern me. I am laying the cards for *her*. I know now, what I did not know yesterday, who is the king of hearts. I have seen him go by, and he has spoke me fair. He is a pretty gentleman and a soldier. When I drew out my pack just now, then there started up the king of hearts."

"And so, Sir John Chevalier is the king of hearts?"

"Ay, ay, I mind that is the name they give him."

The old woman laid her cards on the doorstep. She was a picturesque figure in an old black silk scuttle bonnet, very faded, and a scarlet cloak. She wore a clean white apron, and under her bonnet was the broad frilled cap, beautifully white and goffered.

Sir Thomas watched her with an amused expression in his face.

"And prithee, Goodie, who is the queen of hearts?"

"How can you ask, sir?—surely, my darling."

"I suppose you are trying to bring king and queen together, you old witch?"

"Sir," she replied, "look how the knave of spades comes up between."

Sir Thomas threw her a crown and walked away. But he had not gone far down the street before he turned and looked back.

Then he saw Sir John Chevalier issue from the inn, hold

out his hand to raise Alse, with as much courtesy as though she had been a lady, and lead her into the inn.

"She has gone to nurse her darling," said the knight. "That young fellow has good points about him. Well, the cards might play worse than bring together king and queen of hearts."

CHAPTER XXVII

IN THE BAR

SIR THOMAS TYRWHITT walked down the hill from the Red Lion, situated on the Exeter road, at the extremity of the town, so as to catch travellers from the county capital.

He was arrested by a young man, who wore a bunch of ribbons in his hat, and who saluted him, and, stopping before him, showed that he was desirous of exchanging a few words with the knight.

"You want me?" asked Sir Thomas. Then—"Oh! Samson Furze, as I am alive! What is the signification of these fluttering colours?"

"I have taken the king's shilling, sir."

"You! I am surprised. What the deuce has led such as you to this? Donning a scarlet coat to receive the admiration of the wenches? Verily men are as vain as women."

"No, sir, it is not that. As to the shilling, I may have desired to buy with it an ounce of Bohea for mother, or tobacco for my own pipe. I have joined the ranks, but my reasons concern none but myself."

"Assuredly; and pray what do you require of me? To take a message to the dad to buy you out?"

"Not that at all, sir. I knew my own mind when I enlisted. I am not going back to Wellcombe. But—you have just come out of the Red Lion. They are there—these new people, and I want to know why they have carried her off!"

"Her!"

"Ay, sir—Miss Georgie."

"Perhaps she has come to Ashburton to buy an ounce of best Bohea for her own consumption, or a shilling's worth of tobacco for Alse Grylls. She may have her reasons that concern none but herself."

The young fellow muttered with impatience.

"I want to know," he said, "and, what is more, I will know."

Sir Thomas drew himself up, put his gold eyeglass up and raked him with haughty surprise.

"Sir, you see I have known Miss Georgie for a many years; we was children together. I don't want no harm to come to her."

There was something almost plaintive in the tone, the manner, in which the young man uttered these words.

"As to harm overtaking her, you may make yourself easy on that head, Samson. I will see that she is protected and is well cared for."

"Then why is she with these people?"

"These people are the Weldons. The reverend gentleman has been appointed vicar in Wellcombe."

"But why is she at the Red Lion?"

"She is ill—very ill, with fever."

"Then she ought to be at home. I don't see why she should come to Ashburton to take the fever."

"You colt! She did not come here to catch the fever, any more than, I take it, you came here to get those ribbons. Having got here, you were inveigled into the red coat, and she got ill, that is it."

"Why did she come here?"

"I really am not in her confidence, nor do I recognise your right to ask these questions."

"You call me a colt. I am a cart-horse colt, and she a thoroughbred. She said that. But for all, I do take an interest in her. She was reared to Wellcombe. I've seed her there flying about like a hawk. She shot me, and it is a wonder she did not kill me. I want to know why she is with those people."

"My good fellow," said Sir Thomas laughingly, "if I tell

you that she had offered them hospitality at the Manor House, will that content you? She has been worried and hardly tried, through her uncle's death, and I dare be bound she has come here for a change, and has fallen ill. Now are you satisfied?"

"When is she going back to Wellcombe?"

"I really cannot say. The parson and his wife will be her guests."

"And that young officer, they call Sir John, is he going to be her guest also?"

"There you ask me a question I cannot answer. Perhaps you may like to be informed how many valises and trunks they will take with them?"

"No; why should that young man hang about the Red Lion?"

"Because he takes his meals there. He is Parson Weldon's brother-in-law, and is staying with him. That suffices. You sorely try my patience."

Then Sir Thomas strode forward.

But Samson went after him.

"I want to know, is he going to Wellcombe? Has she invited him to be there?"

"My good boy, you are becoming tiresome. I will answer no more questions. Possibly, when I assure you that I know no more, then you will cease to molest me."

And again he advanced on his way.

It was not the manner of Sir Thomas to be discourteous to anyone, and he was invariably careful to keep on good terms with the yeomen families of the "Venville" parishes, those which bordered on the duchy lands.

But Samson tried his patience unaccountably, and he resented it.

The knight could assume an air of dignity when he chose, an air that froze his interlocutor, and this air he now assumed.

Samson understood, more by his manner than by his words, that it was not the intention of Sir Thomas to allow further pressure to be put on him.

The young man thrust his hands into his pockets and sauntered moodily in the direction of the inn.

He entered the bar, where sat the post-boy, a very elderly boy, who carried on a long-protracted flirtation with the barmaid, a flirtation that never led to a declaration. It had flickered on for several years, and would probably flicker on till it went out altogether.

"Well, now, Mr. Samson," said Anne Joyce, the barmaid, "when be you going to the wars?"

"I can't say," responded the youth; "but I know we shall have to march to Exeter, so soon as the sergeant has made up his numbers."

"I reckon you'll run home and give your mammy a last kiss."

Samson flushed up. He thought she was alluding to the last verse in "Jan's Courtship." He replied sulkily, "I'm bound to bide here, to be sent off when ordered. How is the young lady upstairs?"

"Oh, she is about the same. She'll be amazin' flattered to have two young chaps inquiring after her. There be the baronet they call Sir John, he's asking the question fifty times."

Samson's brow darkened.

"I shall be having fever next," continued the barmaid, "in hopes that the chaps will come after me as often."

"Anne, it be you as throw the young chaps into a fever, and lord, now they comes here and can't help it," said Sparke the post-boy.

"Surely you don't reckon yourself among the young chaps, Mr. Sparke?"

"How long be Sir John going to bide here?" asked Samson gloomily.

"Bless the boy! How can I tell?" asked the barmaid. "I reckon he won't go so long as the young lady is here."

"I be told these people are going to stay at the Manor House in Wellcombe?"

"I don't know nothing about that," said Anne.

"I don't fancy Miss Georgie Thirkleby will relish going back to Wellcombe yet a while," threw in the post-boy. "If you'd been hounded out o' the place as she was, you'd not be over-keen to put your nose into it again."

SAMSON SAT ON THE FARTHER SIDE OF THE TABLE LOOKING GLOOMILY AT THE BOARD

"Who hounded her out?"

"Oh, the women. They hadn't a good word to cast at her, but I reckon they pelted her purty hard wi' foul names, and they drove her raging mad. That is the sense of it, and that explains the fever. It's shame and anger together."

"Why did the officer suffer it?"

"What could he do? There was a parcel of females. You would not have him knock their heads together. The men said nought; they looked on and sniggered."

"I'm sure I would not go back if I were so treated," said Anne Joyce.

"My dear," said the post-boy, "there's no chance of that."

"What! The men indifferent that I should leave Ashburton? Oh, Mr. Sparke!"

"I did not mean that," stammered the post-boy. "What I do feel sure of is that were you so treated, I'd strike right and left wi' my whip, womens or no womens."

"If Miss Georgie will not go back to Wellcombe," said Samson, harping on the one string, "where will she go?"

"Where? Oh, bless your heart, that's all arranged. She'll elope with the young baronet."

Samson sprang to his feet, turned livid, and clenched his fists.

At that moment a hearty voice was heard calling, "Sammy! Is my Sammy here? Where is my Sammy?"

"There's your father come after you," said the barmaid. "I bet a bottle of claret he is come to buy you out."

"Oh, Sammy! you here?" shouted the burly yeoman, as he entered the bar. "Anne, my dear, a couple o' glasses o' white ale in the little parlour. I want a few words wi' my boy all to ourselves."

White ale is a remarkable brew much in vogue in South Devon till of late.

The barmaid at once complied with the request, and Samson sheepishly followed his sire into the private apartment.

When they were alone and seated, the old man proceeded leisurely to sip the slime that went by the name of "white ale," and fixed his son with his eye. Samson sat on the farther side of the table, looking gloomily at the board.

Presently the yeoman set down his mug.

"Sammy," said he, "you're a nice boy to go for to break your mother's heart, and give occasion to bust my pocket. She's a-cryin' till she's cracked her jaw. My purse'll have to bleed golden guineas to purchase your discharge."

"I don't intend to be bought out," answered Samson. He did not touch the liquor before him. "Father, I will not return to Wellcombe. And if mother frets over me, tell her it's her own doing."

"I'll not tell her that. A miller don't go under the sluice when he lifts the hatch."

"If mother is vexed, she brought it all on herself. Who sits on a hot plate must endure blisters. I'm not going home to be the mock of the parish, as one who went a-courtin' of a king's daughter, and was driven away with the mop. I've been cock of the walk, and I'll not go back a plucked fowl. If ever I do return, it will be in my red coat when this matter is forgotten. It was mother's doing; I knew how it would end, but she drove me on. And she would go blaring over all the country what she would do when we had the lordship of the manor."

"Sammy," said the yeoman, "us have all got our special vocations, and it's a duty to fulfil 'em. Generals be sent to fight battles and not to do wool-work. Your mother's mission, Sammy, was to make as much unpleasantness as her could, and her does it. She were given an orging for the purpose, and that there orging is always in use. If fleas didn't bite, and appledrains (wasps) didn't sting, what 'ud they be created for? It is their callin', and they does it. More honour to them. At Furze, mother has but a limited sphere — as Martha be deaf as a post, and I don't mind her a doit. Wellcombe be a fine place, wi' good land, and broad commons, and just about all a rational man can want. He'd think it a paradise, and never sigh for heaven. So a wise providence has sent into it two or three women I could name, just to let us see it ain't all jam."

"I can't go back," protested Samson, looking sullenly below the table. "No, not for years."

"That's no comfort to mother, not more than a cuckoo

could sip out o' the tail of an old launder. Have you nothing for me to say better nor that?"

"Tell her to let me know when Parson's Georgie goes back."

"She'll never go back," said the yeoman. "She has been turned out."

"Then I'd like to hear where to she goes, and whether there be any fine gentleman after her."

"How is mother to hear that? News comes late to Wellcombe."

"Tell her," said Samson, throwing up his head defiantly, "that I shall bring back Royal Georgie to Wellcombe, and all the bells shall ring, and all the folk shout to welcome her, or"—

"Well, Sammy?"

"Or else I shall never return at all."

CHAPTER XXVIII

WHITHER SHALL SHE GO?

"WE are in a quandary," said the Reverend Henry Weldon to his wife and brother-in-law. "Miss Thirkleby is distinctly better. Her fresh and vigorous nature has thrown off the fever. She is most persistent that she will not return to Wellcombe. We, ourselves, have to go there, and her house is placed unreservedly at our disposal. But it does not seem right to go without her; and if she is not there, we can occupy it only as tenants. Again — and here comes in the prime difficulty. When we remove to Wellcombe, what is she to do? Go back she will not. A young thing with her good looks should not be left adrift. She must be placed in trustworthy hands."

"Has she no female relatives?" asked Sir John.

"I cannot learn that she has any. There is a mystery about her. Nobody seems to know anything about her family. Of course, there are stories in circulation, but we have no right to give them credence. I really do not know what is to be done."

"Surely she must have some belongings," said Mrs. Weldon.

"In which direction are we to look for them? We do not even know whether she was the niece of the late vicar. Her story is obscure, and one shrinks from asking too many questions as to her past."

"Not as to her past," corrected the young man. "But as to her origin. Her past must be blameless."

"By some means she has aroused the ill-will of the country people among whom she was reared. That is an

uncomfortable fact, and I can get at no clear explanation of it."

"The ignorant and stupid are always opposed to what is higher and nobler than themselves," said Sir John.

"That she has an impetuous and passionate temper and little self-control," said the vicar, "that we learned by what we saw and heard."

"But consider the provocation!" exclaimed the baronet. "If any folk were to behave to me as those snarling curs did to her"—

"None ever would, John; you are too much of a gentleman to provoke hostility."

"Henry, that is unfair. You imply that she has not acted as a lady," said Mrs. Weldon.

"I think she has been tactless and, perhaps, overbearing. Possibly she may have allowed the peasantry to suppose that she disdained them."

"And she had a right to do so. I despise them utterly; a despicable set, to behave as they did to a young girl, bereaved recently of her only relative, and cast forth into the world homeless," exclaimed the baronet.

"Whatever you may feel, you would not show it, John," said his sister.

"You do not know what the provocation was," observed the vicar.

"I think, sir," said the young man, "you are hard on her yourself."

"I do not judge till I have heard both sides."

"Well, what she has done concerns us as little as what she is," said Mrs. Weldon, interposing. "That which we have to consider is—what is to become of her?"

"Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, as well, is anxious," said the vicar; "but he cannot offer her a home, he is a bachelor. He is old enough, I should have supposed, but he considers himself young. Has she intimated a wish of any sort to you, Lucy?"

"None," answered Mrs. Weldon. "I have, purposely, said not a word about it to her; she persists in declaring that she does not care what becomes of her—only, back to Wellcombe she will not go."

The door opened, and Georgina entered.

She was very pale, with dark circles about her lustrous eyes, making them look doubly large and luminous. She appeared worn and thin, but was composed in manner.

All rose in surprise, and Sir John was starting to salute and lead her to a chair, when his brother-in-law interposed, and conducted her to a seat by the fire.

"This is a surprise and a pleasure," he said.

"I heard you talking," she answered, "and thought you were all together. I shall not find any rest till I have spoken before all."

"Is it wise?" asked the vicar.

"Did you not hear me say that this alone will give me rest? I must vindicate myself."

"A vindication is unnecessary," said Sir John. "No one accuses you of any fault."

This was not true, but a gallant young man is allowed to trench on truth, when paying a compliment.

Georgina took no notice of his remark. She would not sit down, but folded her long white hands before her, and looked from one to another of those in the room.

"You have been very kind to me, and yet you must have supposed me to be one of the most odious of women. I do not see at what other conclusion you can have arrived, after witnessing the manner in which I was treated on leaving Wellcombe."

"The most charming—the most ill-treated," broke in Sir John; but Georgie raised her hand and waved to him to be silent.

"I owe you some explanation. But I cannot give you one that is by any means satisfactory. I tell you frankly that I do not myself understand why I incurred such an outburst of resentment."

She paused to breathe. Her heart was beating fast. It was obvious from the flying flushes that traversed her face and throat, and from the nervous movement of her long fingers, that she felt deeply having to exculpate herself.

"I will tell you plainly all that took place, if you will bear with a rather long story. I will hide nothing. You can

satisfy yourselves at Wellcombe by inquiry whether what I say is true or only half-true, whether I have kept back anything that is material."

Again she breathed fast and hard. Now she unknitted her hands and placed one, the left, on the mantelshelf.

"It all began through a cub of a farmer's son boxing my ears in public."

"Give me his name," exclaimed Sir John Chevalier, starting forward, "and he shall have such a hiding from me that he shall be marked to his dying day."

"For which reason I will *not* tell you his name. I desire that no one should meddle in my affairs, least of all a stranger."

The young man drew back and bit his lip.

"I was very angry," continued Georgie, "and I ran off to the old woman, Alse, who came here to nurse me. She is a sort of a witch, and between us we purposed ill-wishing him. She made a figure, and I was about to stick pins into it for the purpose of giving him aches and pains"—

"My dear Miss Thirkleby," protested the vicar, "surely this is idle superstition. But the intent to do harm is wicked. Out of the heart proceed"—

"It may be so," returned Georgie, interrupting the text, "but excuse me if I say that I am here to explain, and not to hearken to a sermon." Once more she paused, and her fingers worked convulsively.

"The fellow came after me, saw what I was about, and asked pardon. Then I smudged the wet figure, and no harm was done. However, like a fool, he must needs talk about it, and the Wellcombe folk heard what I had attempted, and were afraid for themselves and for their cattle. Soon after that ensued a drift. The duchy officers came over our downs to drive them, and that the Wellcombe commoners always resent. As uncle was lord of the manor, and could not go, I went and I took his pistols with me. Some of us managed to circumvent the gang that was driving away our ponies, and I tried to stop them. I threatened, and I do not quite know how it was, but in the excitement I fired my pistol. Just then, by chance, this young fool who had

troubled me, blundered in the way, and the bullet hit him, and might have killed him, but that he is tough as old leather. He was hurt, that was all. But"—

She halted in the story, put her hands to her temples, and said, "I am leaving this story half told, or telling it badly and out of proper order. Before this, indeed just before I shot him, the lout had the temerity to propose to me. I should have related this before mentioning the drift, but my mind is not yet clear. I was sorry that I had hurt him, but powerless to undo what was done. The men who were with us to repel the duchy people were angry, and, I presume, thought I had done this on purpose; for they had heard of the figure of dough and of the pins. I got home long before the rest, and as they came past our door they stayed and hooted—just as did the women later. They would have done more, have thrown stones at our windows, but that my uncle was dying, as Rebecca told them. Then they slunk away."

She tarried a moment, to allow those who heard her to take in what she had related, and to give herself breath to pursue her story.

Presently she went on: "All went well at the funeral; but after that, this same impudent young man, too dull to understand and too conceited to accept a refusal, came again to trouble me. I sent him about his business rather curtly, that I do admit, but I was angry at the moment. I daresay it offended him, for he thinks a vast deal of himself, and most of the Wellcombe young folk, boys and girls alike, set themselves to flatter him. That is all I did. I was not bound to marry the fellow because I had put a slug into his flesh. I object to being required to serve as a poultice to his wound. The girls ought to rejoice that I have rejected him. It leaves the field open for them. The boys should be satisfied that I have clipped his comb. That is all I have to relate. I refuse to allow the parish of Wellcombe, whether in vestry assembled or informally in mob, to determine my fate, as they decide who is to be admitted into the poorhouse, how many loaves are to be allotted to a certain widow, or how and to whom a parish child is to be apprenticed." Something in

the last simile approached too nearly to her own situation for her not to feel it, and she coloured.

"Dear Miss Thirkleby," said the vicar, "what you have told us is full and explicit as may be. But it does not wholly explain that ugly scene at the last, and I have no manner of doubt that there have been causes at work of which you know nothing."

"It may be so. What I know, that I have told you. I have nothing to add."

Then with a formal bow she withdrew.

The bow had been directed to the vicar and Mrs. Weldon; she had taken no notice of the young baronet.

After she had left the room, all remained silent for some minutes, the vicar looking perplexed, Sir John with an eager expression in his eyes.

"She is a very extraordinary girl," said Mrs. Weldon, the first to break the silence.

"And not one to be left alone," observed the vicar. "She is a creature of impulse, and undisciplined. I wish that we could hammer out some scheme for her future. She is so determinately set against a return to Wellcombe that it would only irritate her unnecessarily to urge her to it. She is a resolute person, and is not one to be swayed by any consideration of expediency, or by any argument."

"But if she is destitute of friends"— began Mrs. Weldon.

"Friends she has. Sir Thomas is distinctly friendly, and he is, in a measure, a guardian, as he is trustee for her property. So far he has made no sign as to his intentions. I suspect he assumes that she will return with us to the Manor House."

"Henry," put in the young officer, "let me offer a suggestion. I will write to my aunt, Miss Chevalier. You know how that we have succeeded at length in getting rid of that objectionable companion of hers, Miss Millward. The dear old thing is now alone, and will be making a bosom friend of one of the domestic servants, and falling under her despotism, unless we intervene and find her a suitable companion. I will write to aunt and ask her to take Miss Thirkleby, if only for a while."

"You shall not do so, John," said Mr. Weldon; "it would be highly improper for you to interfere in the matter. You have already had one rap over the knuckles from Miss Thirkleby for meddling in her affairs, and now I must administer another."

"Take my idea," said Sir John, laughing. "Digest it, and use it yourself if you think fit."

"It seems to me an excellent suggestion," said Mrs. Weldon. "There is no saying, if we leave the gap open, but that aunt may recall the Millward."

"I do think the suggestion good," said the vicar. "But I object to John writing and making arrangements for Miss Thirkleby. I will do that—or, better still, you, Lucy."

CHAPTER XXIX

WITH FOILS

DURING the ensuing days Samson Furze was often seen at the bar of the Red Lion, and Ann Joyce was paying to him considerable and conspicuous attention.

He did not drink deep ; in fact, he consumed but little ; yet he sat there, hour by hour, unweariedly.

Why did he come ?

Surely, thought Anne, he must be drawn there by her personal attractions. "Boys be bashful," said she ; "you have to peel it off 'em as you peel potatoes."

Samson was a well-to-do yeoman's son and only child, and lucky would be the lass who nailed him. As to his having enlisted, that was nothing. He could be bought out, and the expenditure would not be felt by one with a bursting purse, like Richard Furze.

So Anne began to play up to Samson. He did not reciprocate. The post-boy observed what was going on and became jealous. There were as yet no tokens of ignition in the young man, but who could long stand being focussed by Anne's eyes and not flame.

"We're off to Exeter to-morrow," said Samson. "The sergeant has made up his complement, and given notice that we march to headquarters."

"This here bar won't be the same without you," said Anne, with a sigh. "I shall feel as something is gone as can't be replaced."

"I have not spoken a score of words since I came," said Samson. "You say this to make game of me. I won't be

laughed at by anyone, I may tell you. That is why I left Wellcombe."

"Oh, dear Mr. Samson, who ever would think of laughing at you? And so you go to Exeter to-morrow. Then I reckon that is to march as an escort to Royal Georgie; for she goes to-morrow."

"What do you mean?"

"A chaise is ordered, and Mr. Sparke will be post-boy. She is to be taken to Exeter."

"How do you know that?"

"Because Jane, the maid as waits on the party upstairs—the girl wi' the stumpy nose and a mole on the cheek—she heard 'em talk about it, and give the orders for the chaise. They start at ten."

"Who will be with her? That soldier fellow?"

"The baronet? Not he, I think; he goes with the parson to Wellcombe. But Mrs. Weldon, she will accompany the young lady, and you awkwards will march, with your fluttering ribbons, some afore the carriage and some after. Pity you haven't a band to play as you go 'The Girl I left behind me.' I do wonder now whether you will cast a thought on any young lady here—left behind?"

She put down her head, and looked at him from under her lashes and brows, and began to sing—

"'The pretty maids are left in town,
They look from the windows high;
They stand in the street, they crowd in the door,
With many a tear and sigh,
Singing adieu, my boys! adieu, my boys!
Adieu, my boys, adieu!
Alack the day, they be marching away,
Pray, girls, what shall we do?'"

She trilled the song in a light, pleasant voice, and clinked the glasses as she arranged them, but always so as to fall in rhythm with the air.

"I do not know, though, why we should trouble ourselves greatly, Mr. Samson. There is your score. Considering how

long you sit here it is not a terrible long one. We shan't sigh for your money for the till, but for your sweet face."

"Where is she going to stay at, and with whom in Exeter?" asked the young man, disregarding the coquetry and the civilities of the barmaid.

"There!" exclaimed Anne, with a pout, "the only she with you is Miss Thirkleby. I suppose your mother never taught you, when a little chap, that it would be in vain to long for the moon. You must be content to lay hold of what is on your own level. Now, then, keep your hand off my waist."

"I wasn't touching it. I never gave it a thought," protested Samson.

"No more you did. 'Twas the towel that got whipped round my middle."

"Where to is she going in Exeter?" again asked the pertinacious Samson.

"Going to the Chevalier House, I reckon. Jane—she told us something of the sort. But, Lord! I gave no heed to such matters. Go after Jane and inquire for yourself. You can't mistake her, because of her nose and mole."

"Has that baronet got a house in Exeter?" asked Samson, very red in the face.

"I suppose he must have, as it is the Chevalier House. Miss Thirkleby is going there. How nice it will be for you, Mr. Samson. You quartered at Exeter, too. You will have to ask the commandant to let you stand sentinel before the Chevaliers' door, and practice goose-steps, because the Royal Georgie is lodged there. And if you keep your ear cocked you'll hear the baronet saying pretty things to and courtin' of her within."

At that moment Sir John's cheery voice was heard in the passage, and shortly after he entered the bar.

"Ah," said he, "we have a recruit here. That is precisely what I was looking for. Young man, I desire you to follow me upstairs. I wish to demonstrate to some ladies the use of the foils."

"I can't fence," said Samson sullenly.

"Stand up, sir, when I address you," said the baronet. "Are

you aware that I am a captain in His Majesty's service? I am your superior officer, and require proper respect. You may not be drafted into my regiment, but for all that I must insist on discipline."

Samson reluctantly rose to his feet.

"It is really of no importance," continued Sir John, "whether you know how to fence or not. I may give you an initiatory lesson. I have been talking to some ladies in the parlour above about the various manual actions, and wish to illustrate them. There are fencing tools here."

"And we've masks," said Anne Joyce.

"We shall require no masks," replied Sir John. "I want only to show the ladies certain positions and turns. I can manage my foil so as not to touch him, and can assure myself that he does not touch me. Take this fencing tool, young man, and follow me."

"The buttons are all right, I trust?" said the barmaid.

"Oh yes, quite so. Have no fears. I am an old hand, and this young chap is green."

Sir John led the way, and Samson walked after him. They ascended the staircase, and on reaching the landing Sir John threw open a door and passed through, with Samson at his heels.

They entered a parlour, and Samson at once saw Georgie seated near the fireplace, dressed in mourning, very pale, holding a hand-screen. She raised her brows as he entered, but gave no further tokens of recognition. He, on his side, rendered but a curt and clumsy acknowledgment to the bow of Mrs. Weldon.

"It is good of you," said that lady. "Sir John Chevalier has been trying to explain to us ladies the parries, counter-parries, and engagements in fencing. But no words will make them clear to us, and with your help he will elucidate them by illustration. What is your name?"

"Furze, ma'am."

"Come now, Furze," said the young officer. "Take this weapon and stand as you see me do. Hold the foil with both hands thus. I am giving you a lesson in the preliminaries."

Samson stood where placed, with his foil down.

"Furze," said the baronet, "I am going to put you through

attacks, and then I shall be able to show the ladies what are the parries. I am not going to touch you at all with my weapon, but I desire to show you how to fall on me, and let those looking on see in what manner we fencers defend ourselves, whether by parry or by what is called attack on the sword."

Then the young officer patiently instructed Samson in the manner in which he should hold his body, guard, lunge, and attack.

At first Samson obeyed mechanically, and without feeling and exhibiting any interest in the game, and he was clumsy and unready. But after a little while he quickened in all his parts. He seemed to understand what was required of him, and endeavoured to do his best. Georgie, who kept her eye on him, saw his colour deepen and his face kindle.

Occasionally Sir John gave him a word of praise, but this did not affect him greatly. His brows contracted, he became more and more in earnest, and made efforts to reach and touch his antagonist, always, however, ineffectually, for Sir John was ever ready with his parry.

Samson appeared to become vexed, then irritated, that he was always defeated, his blade invariably warded off. The baronet called out the names of the parries and made very light of the attacks. Presently Samson's assaults became more vehement and were delivered quicker.

All at once the foil sprang from his hand, and he was defenceless, and he shook his hand which was jarred.

"*Froisse!*" exclaimed Sir John. "Go, man, and pick up your foil again."

Georgie noticed with some uneasiness that Samson's temper was mounting.

He caught up the blade and rushed upon his adversary. And again it was twisted out of his grasp, and leaped to the other side of the room.

"*Croise!*" laughed Sir John.

Samson set his teeth; he was blood-red, and his eyes flared. He snatched up the foil, put the end between his teeth, tore off the button, and springing upon his antagonist, hewed at him with the weapon.

The baronet at once threw up his foil in guard. Georgie uttered a cry and sprang from her chair. The blow was delivered with such force and fury that the weapon doubled like a switch, and the end coming against Sir John's cheek cut it and drew blood. In another moment Samson was disarmed, and the baronet put his foot on the fallen foil.

"Young man," he said calmly, "you have lost your temper. Go down."

And Furze crept sideways out of the room, lowering at his antagonist, but saying nothing.

CHAPTER XXX

DISPOSED OF

"I HAVE ventured to seek this private interview, Miss Thirkleby," said Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, on the same afternoon, "because I understand that you are leaving Ashburton to-morrow. Surely this is very precipitate and uncalled-for."

"Sir, what is to detain me?"

"Miss Georgie, I have known you many years, and I may almost say that I am constituted your guardian."

"I was unaware of that. My uncle left no will."

"I am your trustee for the manor. That gives me a certain responsibility towards you. You have the Manor House to go to. The interference of Messrs. Hullett and Davey was an impertinence that will not be repeated. As to the plate and pictures and whatever else there may be of personal property in the house, my advice to you is to hold possession of everything till it is claimed by someone who can show a good title to it."

"I am not going back to Wellcombe."

"Why not? I should wish you to be somewhere where I can keep an eye on you, that you are well and happy, and have all that you require. These new people whom you have taken up"—

"I beg your pardon, they took me up."

"Well, as you say, they took you up; and they are, I daresay, estimable, but they are strangers."

"Whereas old acquaintances, as Hullett and Davey, turned me out of my own house."

"If you have become attached to the Weldons, then by all means remain with them, accompany them to Wellcombe, and exercise hospitality towards them in your own mansion."

"I have let it to them for three months. Besides, I have made my arrangements."

"You are going to the Chevaliers?"

"No; to *a* Chevalier, an old lady, singular, I believe, not to Chevaliers *en masse*, in the plural."

"Do you know her?"

"No; but I have heard about her from Mrs. Weldon, who is her niece. I shall receive a small salary as companion."

"It is unnecessary, absolutely."

"I think otherwise. It may interest you to know that she moves in a good circle in Exeter. There are circles and circles, I understand. Some have centres, some are without. The Exeter circle to which Miss Chevalier belongs rotates about the cathedral. There are other circles that are circumferences only and revolve about a void. Miss Chevalier does not belong to one of these."

"Miss Georgie, you are sharp and distant with me. I desire only your happiness."

"So said Mr. Hullett when he kicked me into the street, and Captain Davey responded, 'I swear to it.'"

"Do not equate me with these men."

"Why not?"

"I have a real, deep regard for you, and desire your welfare." He spoke with feeling, and Georgie could see that he was sincere. She softened in her manner at once, and said, "I am sure of that, Sir Thomas. Yet I am not going under tutors and governors."

"Have you everything that you require?"

"In what way?"

"All that you need from the Manor House. In the hurry in which you left"—

"Was ejected."

"Were ejected, you had no time to pack and put everything away."

"I locked up all drawers and cabinets, and put together

my own poor scraps. It is true that I had but a portmanteau, but I have empowered Rebecca and Alse to send me the remainder of my goods, such as I may need in Exeter."

"Is there nothing left behind that it is unadvisable should fall into the hands of strangers?"

"Nothing that I am aware of."

"Then you take with you everything you deem of importance?"

Georgie, who had relaxed her somewhat defiant attitude, at once hardened again. She knew to what point Sir Thomas was approaching, and she remembered the warning given her by the late vicar to be on her guard against his getting possession of the manuscript.

She did not answer his question.

Sir Thomas paced the room with his hands behind his back under the tails of his coat. He had pursed up his lips and knitted his brows.

Georgina watched him and took a malicious pleasure in his embarrassment.

He desired to know about the papers, but shirked mentioning the topic in such a way as to awake interest in them. He was unaware that she read what was passing in his mind.

"I refer to some papers of your uncle," said he hesitatingly.

"I have offered all his old sermons to Mr. Weldon."

"Not those, Miss Georgie; letters, documents."

"There are bills, not all paid, I fear, a large accumulation of them, and several account books."

"I do not refer to these, but to letters."

"The letters are mainly from old London friends; they are locked up."

"Did you happen to chance on a work in your uncle's handwriting, a sort of romance or *jeu d'esprit*, on which he had tried his 'prentice hand?"

"No, I did not chance on it. I sought for and found it."

"Your uncle once talked to me about it. It was a trifle of the imagination, entitled 'THE REVELATIONS OF A MAN ABOUT COURT.'"

"Yes, it is so entitled."

"And you have found it?"

"Certainly. My uncle told me where it was deposited."

"Indeed?"

"Indeed."

Sir Thomas took a turn through the room. His countenance expressed vexation.

"I do wish, as an old friend, that you would let me glance at it."

"Mr. Hullett and Captain Davey wanted to finger it quite as much as do you."

"You surely did not let them have it?"

"Assuredly I did not. My uncle laid on me the obligation not to let it fall into undesirable hands."

"Undesirable, quite so, eminently so—Hullett and Davey."

"But what harm could such a fantastic trifle, as you call it, do to these gentlemen?" asked Georgie.

"It is not a trifle. It contains mention of real personages, who object to having their names bandied about. I was in treaty with your uncle to buy the little work. He named a price for it, and I went to London to consult those interested whether to come to his terms. I return with a definite proposition. I am empowered to offer you an annuity of four hundred a year if you will hand the text over to me—four hundred a year charged on the duchy estate, over which I exercise control."

"The duchy estate!" said Georgie, "that is royal property."

Sir Thomas winced. He had incautiously let out what had better remained unsaid. He hastened to mend his error as best he could.

"Yes, in return for a certain payment made to the duchy. It is a three-corner arrangement such as you cannot possibly understand."

"Four hundred a year!" echoed Georgina.

"Consider, the manor of Wellcombe, with the trifling extent of lands that goes with it, is worth hardly sufficient to maintain you in comfort. Unless you come to some arrangement such as this proposed, you will be in straitened circumstances."

"Sir Thomas, I will not surrender the 'Revelations' to you."

"You are resolved?"

"My uncle's last words to me were: 'On no account let Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt have them.'"

"Resentful, vindictive to the end," muttered the knight. Then turning to the girl, he said—

"He meant that I was not to receive the manuscript till I had obtained the stipulated terms."

"About that he said nothing."

"But it was implied. We were in treaty about it, and the transaction turned on the price."

Sir Thomas, receiving no answer, went to the hearth and stood before the fire, looking into the coals, with his hands on his thighs.

Georgie maintained her position, and observed him. After some minutes' consideration, he turned slowly about and again addressed her.

"Miss Georgie, where is this manuscript?"

"That," she replied, "I decline to state."

"Surely you have not left it in the Manor House, even locked up?"

"No, it is not there."

Sir Thomas took a turn about the room, with his hands behind his back.

"Miss Thirkleby," said he, and his voice shook with emotion, "I should be sorry, most sorry, more than I have words to express, to have to adopt measures that would be unpleasant, not to say humiliating. You have apparently carried off with you this valuable document. It seriously compromises persons in the very highest position in the land. I am quite determined that it shall not be allowed the risk of going astray. You have it, you have it in your trunk or valise. You leave me no alternative, if you persist in your rejection of my handsome offer—I shall be forced to adopt a course of action repugnant to my feelings, which will indeed suffer more acutely than will yours."

"To what does this preamble lead?"

"You will force me to apply to a magistrate for a warrant

to search your boxes. I shall keep guard over you and depute a messenger to a Justice, and I shall be able to place the matter in such a light before him, that he will not scruple to accord me full licence. Consider what this will entail. It places you in a position most disagreeable before the persons of this inn, before the Weldons (who have befriended you), and before Sir John Chevalier."

"You may do this if you please," said Georgina. "It will be but another indignity to which I have been subjected by you men." She laid stress on the last word, with infinite scorn in her tone. "You who set up to be gentlemen, chivalrous, and the pinks of courtesy."

"Miss Thirkleby, do not, I pray you, drive me to it. Think of this. If I find the manuscript and take it away, your claim to the four hundred a year may be disputed, in that the document was not voluntarily surrendered."

"Will it satisfy you if I pass my word as a lady that this same budget of papers, the 'Revelations of a Man about Court,' with its appendix of letters, is *not* in any of my boxes, bags, parcels, that I am taking to Exeter with me, nor that I am carrying it away about my person?"

"Of course I will accept your word."

"Then you have it. It is not with me."

"In Heaven's name, where then is it?"

"I have already disposed of it, Sir Thomas."

"Disposed of it!"

Sir Thomas lost colour and staggered back. He read into the word employed by Georgie another meaning than that intended by her.

"Yes, you will never be able to touch it. It is in vain for you to search for it. It is disposed of."

CHAPTER XXXI

AN OVATION

"THE carriage will be round shortly to take you away, Miss Thirkleby," said the vicar; "I wish you happiness and God's blessing in the new life into which you enter. You will miss the freedom you have hitherto enjoyed, and feel cramped among the conventionalities of a town. On the moor are no barriers. Social life in a town, above all a cathedral city, is like a sheep market, all pens and hurdles. Perhaps when you feel the restraints there, you will look back with some yearning to Wellcombe."

"Oh, Wellcombe itself is well; I dislike the people there."

"Possibly; and I hope a time may arrive in which you will come to regard the good folk of Wellcombe with more kindly feelings than you do at present."

"They are not good folk at all," said Georgie.

"We are none of us wholly bad, any more than some are perfect. When the Fates mixed our futures, they mingled gold dust and soot. So it is with men's characters. They are a blend. It is well to look for the ore and not see the grime."

"And not soil our fingers in the search. No. The brand has burned too deep for the hair to grow."

"Time heals sores."

"But does not efface scars."

"Scars give no pain."

"But remain as disfigurements."

"You will soon be at a distance, and have other matters

to occupy your mind than your grievances against the people of a little moor parish."

She let the point drop. Her heart was too bitter after the insults she had received to be able to forgive.

"Miss Thirkleby," said the vicar, "are you sure that you have everything you require?"

"I have all that I am likely to want. When Alse Grylls returned, I told her what things to pack and send me; some few things of mine that I had not the time to gather and put away in the short time allowed me previous to my ejectment."

"And you have seen that all has been sent as you asked?"

"I have not opened the box. Alse has put everything into a case, and nailed it up. I suppose there was no trunk available, or none with key that would fit. I can trust Alse. She has a retentive memory, and she would do exactly what I enjoined. That reminds me. Salute Moses and Rebecca from me. Against the latter I have not a word. She is not an engaging woman, but is not objectionable. Be kind to Alse. She has no friends, and she loved me. What she will do without me I cannot conceive. I visited her most days, or gave her jobs to do. If you can help her in this latter manner, you will not regret it. Here are the keys. What in the house is mine and what is not mine, no one as yet knows. I have made a rough inventory of the valuables. I locked all the cases and drawers and locked the attic door. Here are the keys."

"But I have no right to them."

"Nor, perhaps, have I. I should prefer that you would take charge of all till it is settled to whom they belong. Possibly Sir Thomas may cause you some annoyance. He may make an excuse to search the house. There is something he particularly wants to get into his possession. It is not there. Let him fumble for it where he will. But those others, Hullett and Davey. Do not suffer them to set foot within."

"I do not suppose that either of them will have the impertinence to attempt an entry."

"Then it remains now only for me to thank you—and I do it with a full heart—for your goodness to me. I hear the post-boy's whip. He is coming round from the yard. For-

give me if I have sometimes spoken sharply. I have had men, and such men, about me hitherto, that I have fallen into the habit of regarding them as my natural enemies, and I address them as such. It is not easy for me to change my manner when I meet one who is good and not self-seeking."

"I trust that where you go you will learn to think more highly of men."

"You have taught me to think so already," answered Georgie.

"One word," said the vicar. "Do not be very impatient with Miss Chevalier. She is trying, you will find, perhaps very trying, but well intentioned. We really are sending you to her in our own interest, she so readily lapses under unworthy influences. You will be doing us a true favour, rendering us your debtors, if you can endure her caprices for a while. For a while only. We really did not know what else to suggest in your interest, and, as it happens, it is a boon to us."

"I will do what I can."

"Here comes my wife, and here is John."

"With a small bouquet of winter flowers, such as I could beg, borrow, or steal," said the baronet. "They are few, but they may remind you that the place grows something besides thorns."

Mrs. Weldon was in travelling dress, and warmly clad. The day was bright and the air soft.

Georgie's box and the case were being taken down. She descended, following them. A choking feeling came into her throat. These Weldons had been kind to her, Sir John attentive, and the ugly maid Jane, with the mole, had been ready to do anything for her and did it cheerfully. The landlady in rustling silk, with hair arranged in miniature barrels about her temples, had never failed to inquire after her, and had pressed attentions on her, and she now tarried below to say good-bye.

Without, on the doorstep, stood Sir Thomas, with something furry cast over his arm. He must have left Prince's Hall at a very early hour, and in the dark, to be now at Ashburton. His hair was quite unruffled and his garments uncreased.

He was watching the adjustment of the trunk and box in their places behind the carriage, and he put out a hand to touch the latter.

This somewhat nettled the girl. She suspected that he was mistrustful of her word, and was scrutinising her luggage in that light. She therefore said, "You have my word of honour, Sir Thomas, and that ought to suffice."

"It more than suffices," answered the knight.

Mrs. Weldon entered the carriage, and Sir John pressed forward to hand in Georgie, then offered her the flowers. The officious "boots" put up the steps, shut the door, and touched his forehead.

"Stand back," said Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt; and going to the side of the carriage, he cast over the ladies' knees an Astrakhan fur rug.

"It will ensure some warmth, in thinking of me," said he. "Warmth *sans* Cayenne."

Georgie turned to thank him, and put forth her hand; but the signal had been given to the post-boy, and the carriage rolled away.

The conveyance had not proceeded a hundred yards before it was brought to a standstill by a great man, who stood across the road in front of the horses, flourishing a stick. At the same moment Georgie saw Moses and Rebecca by the way-side, who now pressed forward to say good-bye.

Moses rolled a dozen apples into the girl's lap, and Rebecca forced a bottle on Georgie.

"Oh, miss! It is a cordial of my own making. Dear blood! whatever shall us do wi'out you?"

Then the big man who had arrested the carriage came round to the side; he had given the post-boy a shilling to halt.

Georgie recognised the broad, rosy, honest face of Richard Furze.

"Do, miss," said the farmer, touching his hat. "I couldn't let y' go wi'out a word. And here, too, be Peter Buzzicott, the clerk, as sez, sez he, he mun see the last o' your sweet face. Please, miss, to overlook that triflin' little affair of the women, when they hollered at you and ca'd you names. 'Twas my

old woman, Susie, as set 'em on to it. Her was just about mad because you'd refused our boy and sent him to the bloody wars. I don't take it amiss that he have enlisted. It'll make Sammy a bit more amiable, mebbe, and not so cocksure. As to my old woman and the rest o' them screeching cats o' females—well, wimmen will be wimmen—they was ordained to it, and us can't help it. You must make allowances. Furze makes a prodigious blaze if you put a light to it, but the grass comes the greener for it."

Then forward came Peter Buzzicott, carrying something tied up in a newspaper.

"Beg parding, miss," said he. "Us didn't like to interfere at the door of the Lion becos the quality was there. My old woman, her'd a come to-day but her's that crippled wi' rheumatics, her can't get about. But her made you a gurt pasty. You'm travellin' a terrible long way—and them pasties be cruel sustainin'. Her's put her heart into it, for sure. You'll find it solid eatin'. Take it, miss, and welcome."

"I—I thank you," said Georgie. She could say no more.

Then the carriage began to move on. But the clerk shouted, "No, Mr. Sparke, not yet. I've sum'ut more. Look here, miss," he drew a sheet of rather dirty and crumpled paper from his pocket. "As you're goin' away from Wellcombe, I don't think you ort to go wi'out a copy of the account of the awful thunderstorm as took place at Wellcombe of which there appeared a long account in the papers. I've heard say as they've a grand cathedral to Exeter, but they arn't a-had no such a thunderstorm as we had. You may go round England and won't find the like. So I've copied out the whole account for you."

Georgie pressed the old fellow's hand as it was thrust into the carriage. Then the clerk shouted—

"All right, George!" to the post-boy, and the wheels turned. But now appeared a line of young women on the road, on each side, waving their handkerchiefs and shouting good-bye!

Some ran beside the chaise, some put their hands in for a shake.

"We're cruel sorry to lose you, miss! Us did behave

shameful. Us knows it now. There, now, let bygones be bygones!"

"Here, Miss Georgie! Here's my coral necklace. Do y' now take it."

"Oh, Miss Georgie! here be a bracelet o' some sort of metal as I picked up in father's field over against Granny Grylls'." And the bronze armlet once offered to her by Samson and rejected was thrust upon her.

"Us have all walked from Wellcombe to have a last glimpse of you," said a third girl. "Here's a packet of peppermints to suck on the road."

"Mother have sent you some liquorice, in case you have a cough," from a fourth.

"Ah, miss! I wish us was chuckin' of an old slipper arter you—you goin' to be married to a king's son, as is vitty."

At length the postilion was able to crack his whip and the horses broke into a trot. The last of those who had come on foot from Wellcombe were left behind.

But just then out from a lane came trotting Squire Hullett and Captain Davey.

"Oh, ho!" shouted the former, presenting a full view of his pasty orb. "We've ridden over to give you an escort as far as Bickington. It shan't be said that you leave us without due honour being paid you."

"I will swear to it," said Davey, bobbing on his saddle on the right side, and turning his blazing face towards her.

So these two men rode on, one on each side of the chaise, occasionally interjecting some compliment that was hardly caught by the person to whom it was addressed, owing to the rumble of the wheels, or some injunction to the post-boy to look after the precious passenger he was conveying.

At the summit of the long ascent to Bickington, whence the road dips into the basin of the Teign, the two riders drew up, flourished their hats, hallooed, made profound bows, shouted good wishes, then turned and galloped back.

Georgie sank back in the carriage, and remained silent for full a quarter of an hour.

Then, rousing herself, she said to Mrs. Weldon, "Excuse

me if I seem uncourteous. I cannot converse. Something is going on in me, I know not what."

"My dear," answered Mrs. Weldon, "do not think of me. I am quite happy looking at and enjoying the scenery. I have never been in this part of the country before, and the drive is full of surprises."

So the girl was not required to make conversation. She allowed her thoughts to travel over the past, and her mind to marvel over the incidents of the departure from Ashburton.

Verily, human characters are made up of soot and gold, and perhaps it may be worth while to sully the hands for the sake of the precious grains. Yet, sometimes, that even is not required; in the sifting of life the ore comes to the top in gleaming particles.

Georgie had not reckoned on any kindly feelings towards her existing in Wellcombe. Her heart had closed against the natives, who had treated her with exceptional and unwarranted rudeness. And yet an outburst of good nature and of affection had taken place, the rough expression of compunction for what had taken place.

Now she recalled many little instances of good feeling, which had been forgotten in the turmoil of her resentment and mortified pride, that of late had raged within her.

These moorland folk were creatures of impulse. They were not governed by reason and prudence; they resembled their mountain burns, now turbid and brawling, then crystalline, dancing on their way in twinkling ripples. They were like their skies, now lowering and stormy, and then breaking into sunshine and smiles.

They must be accepted as they were, the children of nature. More must not be demanded of them than that they should be true to themselves.

That Hullett and Davey, the rogue and the dolt, should have shown a desire to make amends for indignities offered, was indeed amazing. They—even they!

A revolution, or rather the preliminary agitation that precedes a revolution, was taking place in Georgie's heart.

Mrs. Weldon heard a suppressed sob at her side. She said

no word, but drew the girl's hand into her own upon her lap, and caressed it. Neither spoke.

Presently they were at Chudleigh, where horses were changed. Then on, up the long ascent to Haldon, and the day was closing in.

Mrs. Weldon dozed.

Georgie, looking out, saw that they passed among the recruits under the sergeant, not marching, as they had received no drill, but straggling along their way to Exeter.

As the carriage toiled up the height one of these young men walked ahead of his company and kept alongside the chaise.

He said nothing, hardly looked within, but trudged forward with bowed head.

At first Georgie did not pay attention, but as he persisted in striding level with the chaise window her observation was drawn to him, and she recognised Samson.

Then an impulse stirred her, rising out of the changing feelings, and she signed to him to approach. He did not notice her hand, and after a pause she called him by name.

The vicar's wife was asleep.

The young man, with an expression of surprise and pleasure, drew near.

"Samson," said she, "you may come and see me occasionally—only occasionally, mind you. We shall both be strangers in Exeter, and lonely, and may be glad to exchange a word together—about—old Wellcombe."

She had gulped down another epithet that had started to her lips, descriptive of her feelings at that moment towards "old Wellcombe."

CHAPTER XXXII

JOSEPH'S CUP

THE lanterns slung across the street had been lighted, and lamps were burning before some private houses, and candles guttered in the few shop windows that were open after nightfall as the carriage arrived in Exeter conveying the ladies to Northernhaye, where resided Miss Chevalier.

"You must expect to find her somewhat eccentric," Mrs. Weldon said. "She is kind, over-indulgent to some persons, and liable to be imposed upon. Her late companion exercised over her an undue and mischievous influence, and John had to use all his authority to get her dismissed. It was for a moment doubtful which would prevail, the nephew or the confidante. If she had succeeded, poor Miss Chevalier would have become as wax in the hands of a designing woman. Happily, respect for her family and justifiable pride in my brother, her nephew, carried the day. Some old maids have a tendency to lapse under the control of inferiors, who obtain their power either by flattering their vanity or by encouraging their foibles. Then they use their power by poisoning the minds of their mistresses against their relatives. The woman who has been got rid of attempted to shut the door in our faces. John at last took the matter into his own hands. He forced himself as a guest into the house, though the woman did all in her power to put him off, and he succeeded in turning her out."

"You are not afraid of my doing the same?"

"Not in the least. John has a keen perception of character. He said at once that you would be the right person.

'Straight as a whistle,' was his expression. Besides, you are there only to suit yourself, till you can find out what you would like to do, where you would like to go. I know what *we* would desire, above all—that you should come back to Wellcombe. That, however, I suppose you will not consent to?"

"N-n-no."

"Miss Millward, the late companion, took at last to writing my aunt's letters for her; when John offered to call on Miss Chevalier there always came back a reply that his aunt was in such a condition of nervous prostration, or was so troubled with palpitations, that she was obliged to ask him to postpone the visit. At last John went to the house and was refused admission, but entered notwithstanding, and was met by Miss Millward on the stairs. He went past her, deaf to her protestations. It was as good as a play. But here we are. Do not be discouraged if Miss Chevalier is unamiably disposed at first. She cannot get over the loss of her dear Millward."

The chaise drew up at a doorway to a tall brick house with long windows, in the Georgian style, the ugliest which absence of wit in man could design except the villa of white brick with red trimmings of to-day.

A lamp burned over the entrance.

The rap of the post-boy was answered, and the door was opened by a grim, elderly maid, who looked ill pleased at the arrival of Mrs. Weldon and Miss Millward's substitute.

Another servant was in the hall, and Georgie saw at a glance that the domestics were in league to resent the intrusion.

They made difficulties about her luggage. There was no man in the house, and the post-boy could not leave his horses. The box was too heavy for two women to carry upstairs.

Mrs. Weldon turned on them.

"Very well," said she; "I shall inform Miss Chevalier. It is a pity that a general clearance was not effected when Miss Millward was dismissed."

Then the two women sulkily bestirred themselves. Mrs. Weldon signed to the parlour-maid to lead the way and announce herself and Miss Thirkleby. The two were shown

upstairs into a large drawing-room, with handsome curtains and carpet, and with a fire of coals at one end, by which with her gown turned up over her knees sat a little lady with a book in her hand. Beside her was a small table on which stood a pair of silver candlesticks and snuffers in a tray. Miss Chevalier greeted her niece with warmth, but with a touch of plaintiveness in her greeting, and bowed stiffly to Georgie.

"Sit down. Pray take a seat. Say what you will have. You must be dreadfully tired. Such a long distance and the roads so bad. Will you take a dish of tea or wine and biscuits? Or will you have something more solid? Anything, everything in the house is yours, but I must inform you that my servants are tired out. They have had a great deal of extra work to-day, getting two rooms ready. You will excuse a regular supper. I told them that, under the circumstances, I was sure you would pardon the omission. They are willing; but you may work a willing horse to death."

A tap at the door, and the maid entered with subdued malevolence in her face.

"Please, ma'am," to Mrs. Weldon, "the post-boy hasn't been paid."

"That is my affair," said Miss Chevalier, fumbling for her purse. "No, Lucy, you come on a visit to me."

"I beg your pardon," said Mrs. Weldon, putting out her hand to arrest that of her aunt. "If the boy does not know, it is the fault of his master. I said he was to conduct me back to Ashburton to-morrow. He has had his instructions. He will be here to-morrow morning at half-past ten."

"Yes, ma'am."

"The post-boy did not ask for the money," said Mrs. Weldon. "This is a bit of Eliza's impertinence. I am really surprised, my dear aunt, that you can put up with such servants."

"There, there!" protested the old lady. "Do not please touch on this topic, the short time you are here. And fancy beginning on it at the very moment of your arrival. I am very comfortable with them, and they are all devoted to me. They have been in my service for a long time, and worship

the very ground on which I stand." Mrs. Weldon said no more.

"But now," pursued Miss Chevalier, "what will you take? I am sure that you need something."

"Really, bed is all that Miss Thirkleby and I desire. We had a supply of good things on the way, so that, for my part, I could touch nothing if the table were covered."

"I am sorry for that in one way," said Miss Chevalier. "It looks so inhospitable to receive you and give you no food. On the other hand, my servants are fagged out. They have worked like slaves all day. If you really desire bed, would you kindly touch the bell, Miss Thirkleby; we will have prayers."

"Prayers!" escaped Georgie's lips. "It is not Sunday."

"We have family prayers every day. My servants are truly pious and evangelical persons. They would rather go without a meal than miss their devotions."

Georgie pulled the bell-rope.

About five minutes later a servant entered and arranged a set of chairs in a row near the door, then produced from a side table a large Bible in red calf and a thumbed book of family prayers, then set the silver candlesticks one on each side of the Bible, and snuffed the candles.

Presently a procession entered, headed by the scullery-maid. Then came the under-housemaid, followed by the housemaid. The parlour-maid fell into place; then came the lady's maid, and the cook with a glowing face closed the series. Six women to wait upon this one poor shrivelled morsel of gentility.

"I always read first part of a chapter," said Miss Chevalier. "Pray sit down."

Down went the servants, collapsing in a row, and folded their hands on their laps. Six pair of eyes looked steadily and inimically at the new companion. They had all been very comfortable under the Millward régime.

There was less hostility in the cook's eyes, for they had a glassy aspect, and she was struggling to suppress a hiccough, and very little in those of the kitchen-maid—what antagonism this last had was assumed, so as to be like the rest.

Miss Chevalier now assumed a pair of spectacles. She had not used them when reading to herself, but the assumption of glasses across the nose was a sort of investiture for her sacerdotal office.

Presently she began to read—

"Genesis, chapter forty-four." A pause. Then very slowly, articulating each syllable like a child who has begun to read: "And he com-man-ded the stew-ard of his house, say-ing, Fill the men's sacks with food, as much as they can car-ry, and put ev-er-y man's mon-ey in the sack's mouth. And put my cup, the sil-ver cup, in the sack's mouth of the young-est, and his corn mon-ey. And he did ac-cor-ding to the word that Jo-seph had spo-ken."

Georgie remembered that her uncle had never had any prayers except such as he was obliged to recite in church. Miss Chevalier read infinitely slowly. Her uncle had read very fast. Each was equally unintelligible. Miss Chevalier was so deliberate that by the time she had reached the second member of a sentence the tenor of the first had escaped the memory. Mr. Thirkleby had read so fast that the mind in its endeavour to follow lost wind and abandoned the race.

Georgie became aware that she had entered a house where there was a considerable amount of outward profession of religion, whereas in that of her uncle there had been none at all.

She was likewise aware that strong antagonistic forces were ranged against her. That row of seated women might have been a platoon of soldiers called out to shoot her. Happily Georgie was accustomed to ill-will, latent if not expressed, and she did not heed it. On the contrary, it roused the fighting nature in her. But this experience had one bad effect at once. It set back and trod down the rising kindliness that had been filling her heart since leaving Ashburton. The softness was past, and she became hard again.

She heard Miss Chevalier laboriously proceeding with the story of the brethren of Joseph, how they left Egypt and how they were hastening home, how the steward pursued them and charged them with having carried off Joseph's silver cup.

She heard, without giving heed, how that they indignantly

and with strong asseverations of innocence protested that the cup was not with them. It was in none of their baggage. Then she heard how the steward insisted on a search.

"Then they speed-i-ly took down ev-e-ry man his sack to the ground, and o-pen-ed ev-e-ry man his sack.

"And he search-ed and be-gan at the eld-est, and left at the young-est, and the cup was found in Ben-ja-min's sack."

Then Miss Chevalier said, "Let us pray."

At once the row of servants performed with adroitness the evolution of right about face, and plumped down on their knees. The cook only failed in dexterity; she nearly fell over, but was buttressed up by the kitchen-maid.

That night Georgie had troubled dreams.

She had not concerned herself to unpack her trunk. She had taken out only such articles as she at once needed. The case stood against the wall and was nailed up. It would have to be opened with the cleaver on the morrow.

In her dreams Georgie thought she was travelling up Haldon Hill with this case on her back. Looking behind her, she saw Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt in pursuit, pointing, and saying, "The cup! where is Joseph's cup?"

And she strained every nerve to get forward, yet could not, and she kept protesting, "The cup—the cup is not in my case."

CHAPTER XXXIII

THE CAPTAIN'S CABIN

BREAKFAST was late, usually, at Miss Chevalier's. Its production was attended with difficulties. The servants were late. Then they had their own breakfasts. After that their leavings had to be warmed up for their mistress. And before that was done they were constrained by the exigencies of digestion to sit for half an hour and talk. Moreover, the cook liked to skim the daily paper before returning to the fire.

At breakfast, on the following morning, Miss Chevalier was cheerful and chatty.

Mrs. Weldon informed her that she had brought for her a pound of clotted cream from Ashburton, and had given it to the cook overnight to put in a cool place.

At breakfast a jam glass appeared with some in it, about four ounces by weight of cream.

Miss Chevalier was interested to hear particulars of the cure to which Mr. Weldon had been appointed; and the vicar's wife tactfully referred to Georgie as one most intimately acquainted with Wellcombe, as a means of drawing her into the conversation.

When breakfast was over and the ladies rose, Georgie said, "I have brought down a little bunch of flowers that Sir John gave me—I presume for you, Miss Chevalier. They are not much, he said, but all that he could get in Ashburton."

"I value whatever comes from the dear fellow," said the lady. "Will you touch the bell and ask for some cold water. We will put them in a vase here. But stay—I believe that at

this moment the servants are having their snack between meals. I hate myself being disturbed whilst eating, and consequently do not like to break in on them. Would you mind, Miss Thirkleby, running down into the kitchen and bringing me my little water can?"

Georgie obeyed. She descended to the lower regions, and entered the kitchen as the domestics were enjoying themselves on bread and cream, or, to be more exact, on cream and bread.

"Now, look here, miss, once for all," said the cook, "this is my realm, and I don't allow nobody in it. So clear out."

"I shall go whithersoever the mistress of the house sends me," answered Georgie. "Give me Miss Chevalier's can with fresh water in it."

During the morning, after Mrs. Weldon had departed, Georgie was with the old lady, and endeavoured to ascertain from her what were the duties required of her; whether to see to household affairs, the ordering of meals, the management of the servants, the keeping of accounts, or whether she was supposed, as companion, to be with and amuse Miss Chevalier.

She found the old lady vague in her ideas as to duties. The house managed itself. The meals came approximately at the proper hours, the servants were all that could be desired, and needed no supervision. Accounts were never kept; but Miss Chevalier liked to be talked to and amused. The old lady recurred occasionally to the excellences of Miss Millward, and harped on the smoothness with which life had moved when she was there. No troubles about the servants, no complaints, whereas since she had been dismissed, either Lucy (Mrs. Weldon) or Sir John had been much with her, and there had been many worries, complaints against the servants of incivility and of wastefulness.

"If they are a little wanting in frugality," said the lady, "I had much rather it was so than that I should be vexed. I can make both ends meet, and I like to take life easily. But Lucy has a way about her that ruffles me. I hate to be fretted because some crusts are thrown into the ash-bin, or because the butcher's meat is under weight, or because there

are men in the kitchen. Life is not worth living if one has to be troubled about such matters. My servants are good Christian people, and would cheerfully starve themselves rather than I should want anything. Perhaps you would like to be shown over the house. I will take you. Then you will know your way."

The old lady rose with a rustle of her garments. She wore a shot grey silk dress, and dark mittens on her hands. She had been pretty, but was now withered, yet she had good features. Her hair was done into little curls under a lace cap with black ribbons.

She never left the room without drawing a barège shawl over her shoulders.

"You will be pleased to see the house, I suppose?" she said. "It belonged to my mother. She came of a good family, and brought my father some money—but I have that now. We are in Northernhaye, on the site of some of the old castle buildings, in a commanding position. There are fine trees here, and I have a respectable garden. My garden," continued Miss Chevalier, "is mainly for flowers, but I have a vegetable garden as well. Unhappily the slugs are numerous, and so is the wire-worm, and now I have to get all my vegetables from the greengrocer's. There is a little conservatory—rather damp, and the flowers mildew in it. The gardener says that the aspect is unsuitable. I have to purchase fresh plants every year, and my bill to the seedsman and florist comes to quite a considerable figure. My bulbs have a curious peculiarity. They die in my garden but come up at a distance in that of my man, who supplies families with cut flowers. He tells me that it is really surprising how far underground bulbs will travel if they dislike the soil in which they are placed. My gardener is an invaluable man. I pay him a guinea a week, and he is a true Christian. Aspect is against me, he says. You see my garden slopes to the north."

By this time Miss Chevalier had descended the stairs to the hall.

"Here on the left," said she, "is the dining-room. On the opposite side, that door—will you kindly open it?—leads into

what I humorously call the captain's cabin — two rooms given up to my nephew. One is the bedroom, and the other is a little boudoir. I have been obliged to make the farther apartment his sitting-room, for—I grieve to say it—he smokes. It is his sole vice. I could not let him have his cigar in the room that opens on to the hall, because then the fumes would be perceptible there, and reach me in the drawing-room. So I have had the outer chamber converted into his sleeping apartment, and beyond is the room in which I tolerate his smoking, so long as he keeps his head up the chimney and the window open. I trust your uncle never smoked."

"Oh yes, he did."

"Ah, poor man! and called to his account. You have seen my nephew. He is a thoroughly honourable, straightforward man, but he has only a small estate, and looks to get forward in his profession. It is unfortunate that he has so few relatives, and none in a position to push his interests at head-quarters. I can find no fault with him; his tastes are simple, but I do not like his smoking, and he has given me some annoyance by meddling in my domestic affairs. Ah! there is the summons to dinner. I dine early, and on Sundays and Saturdays have cold meats so as to save the servants. That was the first bell. We have still a little time. Apart from the difficulty about John's smoking, I like to have him here, as he gives less trouble to the servants who have to bring up water and coals. When John is here, I am obliged to dine late, and then I generally invite some of the officers to dinner, or let him bring his friends."

Miss Chevalier led the way into the inner apartment. "Cosy, pleasant little parlour for a bachelor, is it not?"

The inner chamber panelled with deal, painted white, had on one side a bookcase well filled.

"I should object to his smoking here," continued Miss Chevalier, "as you see it is a library, and smoke adheres to books. But, as you see, they are not works I am likely to require: *Pinkerton's Voyages*, *Locke on the Understanding*, *Smith's Wealth of Nations*, *The Farmer's Magazine*, *Gillie's History of Greece*. I keep the books here; they belonged to my uncle, and I never look into them."

"Surely this," said Georgie, "will be in your line," and she pointed to the back of a volume labelled *An Introduction to a Godly Life*.

"Oh, that," replied Miss Chevalier, not noticing the touch of malice in the girl's tone, "that is only a sham book; back and emptiness. It is intended for pamphlets or newspaper cuttings. Just a case to contain what would otherwise litter about."

"Does Sir John often stay with you?" asked Georgie.

"Rarely—very rarely. You see he is with his regiment most of his time, or with Lucy. He is much attached to his sister and likes his brother-in-law. They get on admirably together. Only once in the way can he afford to visit his old aunt. There is the second bell."

It was not Sunday or Saturday, accordingly there was not cold meat only on the table. The little meal was good and nicely served. There were cutlets and mashed potatoes and game, also an open jam tart.

"I think," said Miss Chevalier, "I could relish some of that clotted cream Mrs. Weldon brought. It would go well, Eliza, with the fruit in the tart."

"Please, ma'am, there is none left," said the maid.

"None left!" echoed Miss Chevalier. "How odd—I thought—and I am so fond of cream."

"There was really very little, ma'am. You had some at breakfast, and the thunder has turned the rest, so that cook had to throw it away."

"Thunder, and in midwinter?"

"It is in the air, ma'am."

Georgie wondered whether in that professedly pious household more mischief was not done than in that of her uncle, who was cynically pagan. This old maid demoralised all her domestics, making them dishonest and hypocritical.

CHAPTER XXXIV

A FIND

IN the afternoon Miss Chevalier was accustomed to doze, and she let Georgie understand that she was free. Accordingly, having time at her disposal, she unpacked her trunks and put away the contents in the chest of drawers and wardrobe of her bedroom. Then she seated herself to consider her position.

She hardly knew whether to be angry with or to pity the old lady, who in her selfishness refused to look into the conduct of the household, lest it should interfere with her own ease.

There had at least been no profession of religion about her uncle, and she was almost inclined to think that the moral atmosphere in his parsonage was more wholesome than in the residence of this pious spinster.

It was, said Georgie to herself, no concern of hers that this old lady should be cheated, for Miss Chevalier was content to have it so, and resented any attempt to break into her fool's paradise. Nevertheless, Georgie was uncomfortable.

To see this sort of thing going on before her eyes, and allowed to pass uncommented on and unrebuked, militated against what she considered to be right.

She was aware that she was an inmate of the house on sufferance, put there by the Weldons to keep out the Millward.

Miss Chevalier was restless to be back in chains under the thraldom of the discarded companion. Georgie would have to act with the utmost judgment. For the sake of those kind

people who had nursed and befriended her, she must do what she was able to serve their ends.

Georgie knew what the danger was. The old lady was very comfortably off, and possessed so good an income that she was not sensible of the reckless prodigality that went on in the house. The Weldons were poor—the living of Wellcombe was little better than a dying. It was worth but two hundred a year, and the solitary position of the place necessitated the keeping of a pony trap. What Lucy Weldon feared was lest Miss Millward should get such control over the mind of her aunt as to induce her to leave her money to the companion instead of the niece. Miss Millward had been got rid of, but there was no certainty that she was completely routed, past recovery.

Georgie saw clearly that if she attempted to put to rights what was wrong in the establishment, this must be done cautiously. There must be no precipitation, or Miss Chevalier might revolt, order her to leave, and recall the Millward. That would be a poor return for the kindness shown her by the Weldons.

She deemed it advisable at first not to interfere between the mistress and her servants. If she observed gross dishonesty and dereliction of duty she would communicate with Mrs. Weldon, and leave her to act as she judged most expedient.

Her own position in the house was undetermined. She was not empowered to act as housekeeper, the keys were not permanently committed to her. When something was required that was under lock, Miss Chevalier said, "My dear Miss Thirkleby, will you kindly save me the trouble of getting it? Here is the key. Be so good as to return it to me."

She did not collect the bills and pay the accounts. Payment was done in a haphazard manner through the cook or the parlour-maid, and the bills were accepted by her and unverified.

She was not to read to Miss Chevalier, who was quite able to occupy her mind with a book unassisted. She was not to play cribbage with her, for Miss Chevalier regarded cards as savouring of evil.

She was a companion in name only—"to touch the bell," for the lady, and to put coals on the fire, and this to save the parlour-maid trouble, and to fetch and carry.

But Georgie was shrewd, and she soon perceived what it was that the old lady really required, and what she hinted at was precisely that which the girl could not give. She expected to be made a fuss with, to have the companion take ten thousand unnecessary precautions to secure her in health, to administer flattery incessantly, and to fall in with her charitable schemes. About these latter Georgie was too ignorant to feel interested, and she had too much self-respect to administer flattery.

Having riddled this all out in her own mind, and come to a conclusion as to what her conduct should be towards Miss Chevalier on one side, and towards the domestics on the other, Georgie drew a long breath, rose from her chair, and addressed herself to the task of opening the case sent by Alse Grylls, that contained her after-thoughts. It was a rough deal box, clumsily fastened with old nails that had been beaten straight, and then hammered in with a stone. As they had gone into the wood in all directions, had protruded and split the wood, or had doubled over, the lid was not particularly firm. Accordingly, the old woman, to make secure, had roped the box about, and had fastened the cord in many knots.

It cost Georgie much time to undo these. She could not cut them, as she had but a tiny pocket-knife that was blunt, and the cord was too thick to be severed by the scissors.

When the bonds were removed, the nails offered no effective resistance. By means of the tongs she was able to heave the lid and start them.

Then she threw open the case, and saw that it was stuffed with a host of trifles, mostly reminiscences of childhood, along with a riding-habit, and some coloured dresses that she was not likely for some time to require.

As she lifted the habit, she was surprised to find that it weighed heavier than she had anticipated. Then, considering that it might be wrapped about some fragile article, she cautiously unrolled it, and started and caught her breath as

she recognised a brown earthenware jar, sealed up, and labelled "Allspice."

Along with this was a rudely scrawled note.

"Dear Miss Georgie,—There now, doanty be angry if I send you back this here cloam pot and all therein, for sure as eggs be eggs I be an ole woman and my days may not be long. And the folks might take it into their heads to burn me out of house and home, seeing as I be no better nor an ole witch. There be no tellin'. These Wellcombe folk be amazin' comical dogs. An' I thowt my dere lamb, as 'ow I could have no rest thinkin' of my bein' in charge of thickey cloam pot, and its contents, and as 'ow you mite want of it some day, and as 'ow it reely belongeth to you. And as 'ow I couldn't be surety for it, me bein' an ole woman an' my days drawing to evening. So 'aving this 'ere chance I thowt well to lay 'old thereon and send you the pot back right on end, and you can keep it and the 'ponsibility will be your'n. God blessy is the dayly praer of

"Ole Alse."

Georgie sank on the floor and covered her face with her hands, overwhelmed with shame. She had passed her word of honour to Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt that the manuscript was no longer in her possession.

When he was eyeing the boxes, she had challenged him with mistrust in her good faith. It was relying upon her word that he had refrained from an examination of her goods. She felt as though she could never look the knight in the face again. Her face burnt. She was choking with emotion, and the scalding tears poured over her cheeks.

What was to be done? How could she clear herself? Should she write and explain the circumstances? It was the only reparation she could make for her unintentional lie, the only way in which she could cut off from her the imputation of the basest deception, should it come to his knowledge that she had carried away with her the "Revelations of a Man about Court."

In an access of humiliation she started from the floor, went

to the table, and wrote an incoherent letter of apology and explanation. It was marred by the tears that fell on the page. She tore it up and recommenced another.

But then further consideration came and arrested her hand. If she confessed that the coveted manuscript was with her, Sir Thomas would assuredly hasten to Exeter, and renew his abortive attempt to wring it from her.

She could refuse him again, but there was this to be thought of as complicating the situation. It was more than possible that Miss Chevalier would be drawn into the dispute; she might come to hear of the story connected with Georgie's origin, and the girl had gauged the character of the mistress of the house to know that she was vastly inquisitive. Further, if Miss Chevalier should know her story, and of the eagerness with which this manuscript was desired, then in half an hour it would be known in the kitchen, and everyone in the house would be on the alert to get a sight of the document.

The girl would have the utmost difficulty in keeping it from prying eyes.

In a strange house, with nothing that she could lock except a trunk furnished with an ordinary lock, such as a chance key might fit, this would be full of risk.

She tore up a second letter that was incomplete. Then she left the table. Her first consideration must be where to dispose of the precious budget. Her trunk was out of the question. The box in which Alse had sent her collection had the lid in a shattered condition.

Georgie tried the drawers of her writing-table. They had locks, but no key, nor had a cabinet against the wall. The chest of drawers was without locks. She searched for a hiding-place in the room. There was none in any way suitable.

She worked the cork out of the jar, and withdrew the manuscript. It was too bulky to be carried about by her everywhere and all day in her pocket.

What was to be done with it?

She seated herself in an arm-chair, opened the parcel, and spread out the volume on her lap. Then she fell to musing.

In this collection of closely written sheets was the story of her mother. A life's tragedy was compressed within a few

SHE REPLACED THE SHAM BOOK ON ITS SHELF

pages; the tale of a woman's wrongs, of her griefs and woes. Not, indeed, the whole story; only the surface ruffle. It told nothing of the inner stirrings and writhings, under shame, neglect, desertion; only the bare facts, substantiated with letters. The depths below might be guessed,—they were not disclosed, except in one piteous epistle addressed to a brother.

On no account would Georgina have suffered those odious men, Hullett and Davey, to look into those sheets. Sir Thomas was somewhat different; he might understand and feel for the griefs of which those pages told so much and yet which they expressed so little. But never would she, the child of the sufferer, allow a common eye to study that record. She had been forbidden to show it to Sir Thomas. The thought that it might be read by Miss Chevalier and be gloated over in the kitchen made Georgie's cheek flame.

What was to be done with that horrible volume? There was absolutely no hiding-place in her chamber.

Yet it must be concealed somewhere.

Then suddenly an idea flashed into her mind. She recalled the study, with its library shelves and the sham book-back. Behind that cover there was a vacant receptacle.

She concealed the manuscript about her person and left the room, stole down the staircase to the principal landing. There she gently opened the drawing-room door, looked in, and saw that Miss Chevalier was dozing in her chair with a book on her knees.

Georgie softly shut the door and descended farther, till she reached the hall. There also she stood still and listened.

The servants were below. She could hear their tongues in hot discussion in the kitchen, whence also issued the odours of a pipe.

She slipped through the door on the left hand as she stood facing the house door, passed through the captain's cabin, or bedroom, into the tiny library beyond.

There she stood on tiptoe and drew out the case with the back labelled *Introduction to a Godly Life*, and thrust within the "Revelations of a Man about Court."

Then she replaced the sham book on its shelf. In such a house as that, where godliness was all superficial, such a title

as that pasted on the back would safeguard the book, or supposed book, from being taken down.

"There it is perfectly secure," said Georgie; "even should Sir John arrive, which is hardly probable, he will never think of looking into it. The servants certainly never."

CHAPTER XXXV

SAMSON AGAIN

AS Georgie issued from the captain's cabin into the hall, simultaneously a servant appeared from the kitchen, and, arresting her steps, said, with a twinkle in her eye and a quiver of the lip, "If you please, miss, there is an officer has lost his way, and come round to the back door, and is asking if he may be allowed to call on you."

"An officer! I know none except"— she hesitated—but of course this could not be Sir John.

"Well, I can't take on me to say exactly what his rank is, whether a general or a sergeant, but, as he asked for you, I took it as a matter of course that he must be high up in the army."

"What is his name?"

"Furze, I think he said."

"Oh, Samson."

"I'm not, miss, that familiar with him as to have his Christian name on the tip of my tongue," said the maid. "What shall I say?"

"Show him into the dining-room. I will speak to him for a few minutes. He is a recruit from Wellcombe."

Then Georgie bit her tongue with vexation at having condescended to an explanation.

A couple of minutes later Samson Furze appeared in his military accoutrements, supremely conscious of the fact, and was received somewhat coldly and distantly by Georgie in the room into which he was shown.

She was vexed with herself for having in a moment of weakness unbent to invite him to call.

The maid who ushered him in left the door ajar behind her as she retired, and Georgie did not deem it advisable to shut it.

She remained standing before the recruit and did not ask him to take a seat. She was suspicious that the servant-maid was listening greedily without to hear what passed within.

"You are come somewhat quicker than I had expected," said Georgie, "I presume urged by an irrepressible desire to exhibit your red coat, as children run to display their new suits."

He coloured and looked down.

"You asked me to come and see you," he said.

"Yes, I was curious to note the transformation."

"Shift of quarters has not improved your tongue," he said irritably.

"No, but I have not been thrust into a uniform."

"But you are in service. Butlers don't wear livery, and I suppose nor do housekeepers neither."

"Probably," said the girl, "you will wish me to write a full account of the glories I have seen, to be detailed in Wellcombe. Samson Furze converted into a warrior in a red coat, only surpassed in depth of dye by his own cheeks, which flame with gratified vanity. Whether he has acquired the art of wearing his cap jauntily on one side is unknown to me, as I have not witnessed his swagger along High Street. Nor can I state whether he has abandoned his trick of putting one hand in his pocket. As he stands upright he has an inflated appearance about the breast, but whether puffed out with pride or with cotton wool is undetermined."

"Miss Georgie," said the young man angrily, "you asked me here to talk about old Wellcombe. I would not have come if I thought you was goin' to treat me thus."

"Samson, I cannot write to anyone else about you except to Mrs. Weldon, and she is a stranger as yet. I should advise you to go to a miniature painter and be drawn. It will gratify your mother!" Then, wishing him a good-evening, she abruptly left the room and ran against the servant, who made a pretence of going to the front door to answer an imaginary bell.

Georgie ascended the stairs. She was annoyed at Samson taking her at her word and calling to see her so early after her arrival. She had been sharp with him, sharper than she desired. She had hurt his feelings, and regretted it. But she had taken the line assumed because well aware that there was an eavesdropper, and that every word spoken would be reported, and discussed in the kitchen. She felt, moreover, that it was advisable to take from him at once the inclination to renew the visit. He must not be allowed the slightest hope that she was relenting towards him.

When she entered the drawing-room she found that Miss Chevalier was awake, and was doing some crochet work.

"A raw recruit from Wellcombe has been here to show himself in his new uniform," said Georgie. "He is a substantial farmer's son."

"Oh, he will be exposed to great temptations. I have some suitable tracts adapted to soldiers. I should like to have them presented to him."

The old lady bustled about a set of drawers in which she kept piles of indigestible religious literature.

"I am afraid it is too late to-day," said the girl. "I have dismissed him, and"—

"Surely with a word of admonition."

"Oh yes! I sent him to be miniatured."

"That will feed his vanity. Surely if you were to run after him with these"—

"Would it look well, Miss Chevalier, for me to be seen careering down High Street fluttering tracts in pursuit of a young soldier? People might mistake them for valentines."

"Well—another time. Perhaps you are right. The world is prone to think evil."

Samson, however, had not gone out of the house. When Georgie left the hall, she had seen the servant at the front door, and presumed that she would let the young man out.

But this was not the intention of Eliza. She tarried, watching till the girl had disappeared, and then, with a winning smile, said, "Mr. Furze, will you condescend to come down to the kitchen and have a glass of ale and some cold mutton? There is a nice tender leg. Cook will be so pleased; she has

a half-brother in the army and has a leaning to military matters. I dare be sworn you are not particularly well fed in barracks."

To a solitary lad, away for the first time from home, without acquaintances, and short of the ample meals provided in a farmhouse, sore from a rebuff received from the woman whom he admired, it was not possible for Samson to refuse the invitation.

In a few minutes he was seated by the kitchen fire amid a circle of admiring maids, with a glass of good beer, and a jug containing more beside it.

"You may take a pipe," said the cook; "if missus do smell anything, we say that the gardener has been in to light the stuff he has for fumigating the conservatory."

Thomas, the lady's maid, had a fine pair of dark eyes which she rolled when occasion offered. The occasion had come, and they rolled like wheels rushing down High Street hill.

Sarah Jane, the housemaid, had prominent teeth; her jaw was formed like that of a rabbit. She was painfully aware of it, and laboured, especially in male society, to purse her lips and conceal the defect. Then her mouth was like a rosebud. But when it was full blown the charm was gone. Now she sat with her lips screwed together, contemplating Samson.

And Samson was worth looking at. He was a fine young man in his civilian dress—he was decidedly handsome in his military uniform. Cook had a soft place in her heart for soldiers. As she contemplated Samson that soft spot dilated into a Chat Moss. She was prepared to give him anything that the larder contained, and to break into the cellar for her mistress's best port.

After a long pause, in which the maids sat contemplating Samson as he drank and ate, and enjoyed the contemplation more than he did the meal, he asked, putting down his knife, "How often does the captain come here?"

"Which captain?" asked the cook sweetly. "There are two or three or four. There is now Captain le Gryce and Captain Fairweather."

"Who be they, please? But I know the first; I'm took on

as a sort of servant or orderly to he. Who be the others, and why do they come here?"

"Mistress is very partial to having young officers here to dinner, and to call. They call so as to get an invite to dinner, and they have that because I am cook and know how to send up what is good. But Lord! the mistress has them because she thinks she elevates their morals. When they goes away she gives 'em tracts, and they forgets 'em in the hall—don't they, Eliza?"

"Yes—when they gets their overcoats, they leave the tracts behind."

"Or chuck 'em over the wall into the next garden. Folks ha' complained of the nuisance of having them papers flyin' about."

"They laugh at her behind her back," continued the cook, "but they come here. She's not mean. But she don't bring out her best wine for deputations."

"What are deputations?"

"A sort of missionaries as comes home to brag o' what they've done among savages, and get money to send others to do the same. They don't know good wine from bad. And I don't never send up sweetbreads to they. I do to the officers."

"I do not want to know about these captains," said Furze. "I mean him as they call Sir John."

"Oh, her nephew! He comes here now and then, why I'm 'mazed to know. The old lady's money won't go to he, but to his sister as married the parson. So whatever brings him here I can't tell. He got rid of Miss Millward. But Mrs. Weldon, she's the wust. She is no gentlewoman. She looks into things as she didn't ort."

"You know Captain le Gryce," said Eliza, the parlour-maid, heaving a little sigh. "He is a very nice gentleman, so affable in his ways. He always do have a little talk and a joke wi' me as I helps him to his overcoat."

"He's a fine man," said the cook; "and what a pair of eyes he has!"

"Yes, he has eyes," echoed Thomas, making her own rotate, and uttering a little cough to bid Samson devote his attention to her eyes, for she also had those organs.

"You seem to know Captain le Gryce," said Sarah Jane, for the moment disclosing her teeth.

"Yes," answered the young man; "he has took me on to attend to him. I don't know more nor that. He has a temper."

"I'm terrible afraid he's killed more ladies than he has Frenchmen," observed Eliza.

"You seem to know something of the young person who has come in Miss Millward's place," said Thomas, after a lull in the conversation, during which doubtless an angel passed through the kitchen into the scullery.

"Miss Thirkleby she calls herself," said Sarah Jane, letting her teeth flash out.

"She comes from Wellcombe," remarked Furze.

"A relation perhaps?" asked the cook suavely.

"No, she's above me. I'm a cart-horse and she is a racer."

"There, now, I wouldn't say that," observed Eliza, the parlour-maid. "We all have our different builds and dimensions. To be plain, we don't consider her anything of a lady."

"Not a lady!" echoed Samson, in blank astonishment.

"To come down into the kitchen unasked, when we are having our luncheon," said the cook.

"To turn out Miss Millward and take her place," threw in the under-housemaid.

"I tell you all," said Samson, looking about him in some heat, "that she is a lady. She is a niece of the vicar—our vicar as is dead."

"We don't think much of vicars here," said the cook. "We have harchdeacons and deans and canons, and them vicars-choral and lay vicars is just nowhere."

"Our vicar was a grand man," said Furze. "He wor a proper gentleman, I can tell you, and was chaplain to His Majesty, afore ever he became king."

"He were paid for it," said Eliza sententiously. "So was the boy as blacked the boots."

"Mr. Thirkleby was a real gentleman," retorted Samson, waxing angry.

"We've most of us got relations as is either parsons or clerks, or some ways in the church," said the cook. "But what was her father? That concerns her a deal more than what was her uncle."

"Her father!" exclaimed Samson. "Her father was a mighty deal higher than anything you can think of, even if you was to climb up on the backs of your chairs."

"Maybe a chimbley-sweep," said Eliza sarcastically. "He's a very tall man as looks out of the top of a flue, fifty or a hundred feet above most of our heads."

"A chimbley-sweep," retorted Furze, becoming incensed. "Who dares to say that? Her father is he whose livery I wear and under whose banner I march."

"You speak riddles, Mr. Furze."

"I tell you she is the king's daughter. We all know that in Wellcombe. She is the Royal Georgie." He rose to his feet and saluted. "She is the child of His Majesty, George the Fourth! God save the King!"

CHAPTER XXXVI

CAPTAIN LE GRYCE

"CAPTAIN LE GRYCE!"

Miss Chevalier was in the drawing-room. She was wide awake from her nap, and had been dictating to Georgie, on the equality of all men.

At the announcement the girl rose. She had some needle-work in her hands, and she made as though she would leave the room.

"You need not withdraw," said the hostess. "Captain le Gryce and I have no secrets, and he may be the means of doing much for the young protégé of yours you were speaking about. He would look after his morality as a father."

Then, turning to the visitor, she said, "Delighted to see you, captain. Let me introduce Miss Thirkleby, my new companion."

Georgie curled her lips. Miss Chevalier had been talking about the equality of all Christian people, and now intimated to the visitor not to treat her as on the same level as herself.

Georgie withdrew into a window, and stood there continuing her work.

"Very glad indeed to have the honour of a call," said Miss Chevalier. "Pray take a chair."

The old lady signed to the visitor to occupy that recently vacated by the girl.

He bowed to the latter, and, taking the back of the chair, turned it about, so that he could address the lady of the house and at the same time look at the companion, whom a glance had shown was worth observing.

He was a tall, gentlemanly man, somewhat stiff in his movements, with black hair cut short, and with whiskers shaved off on a level with the nostrils. He had dark, pebbly eyes. His voice was slightly rasping.

"The pleasure is mutual," said he. "No one can see Miss Chevalier without being pleased, because he feels himself improved."

"You are good to say so," observed the lady, accepting the compliment as not undeserved. "I do what I can, but my area is limited. How about the Jews?"

"The Jews!" He drew back, somewhat startled by the abrupt question.

"Their repatriation," said Miss Chevalier, in explanation. "You will remember I broached the topic when last we met. Do you think that you could interest your fellow-officers and the men of your regiment in the restoration of the Jews to their own land?"

"Miss Chevalier, I assure you that I and my brother officers would be only too happy to send them, bag and baggage, to the land of their fathers."

"There is," said the lady, "a movement among them in that direction."

"Carrying with them, I fear, the spoils of the Gentiles."

"Indeed, captain, some little pecuniary sacrifice on our part is required to provide them with means to enable them to return."

"My dear Miss Chevalier, they have already been subscribed to so liberally by myself and the rest of our men that I can promise no further assistance."

"But could you, now, interest your men in the question? Your influence among them must be great."

"I am not sure. They are not brought in contact with the Jews so much as are their officers, and therefore feel a less lively interest in them, and are not so keen in their desire for their repatriation."

"It has been prophesied," said the old lady.

"But prophecies take a deuce—I mean a decidedly long time in reaching their fulfilment." As he answered the hostess his eyes travelled incessantly towards Georgie, whose fine

profile was pencilled against the light. He sought to discover whether she was of the Millward kidney, to sympathise in all with the mistress of the house, or whether she disdained these fads and appreciated his replies.

Georgie felt that his keen eyes were on her, but she did not look towards him.

His manner, so contemptuous in addressing Miss Chevalier, annoyed her. She would have spoken in precisely the same manner herself, but never before an inferior or domestic. In the captain's eyes she was an underling, only a companion, and before her he was making her mistress look foolish.

He parried Miss Chevalier's questions, putting aside the topic that excited her; but though this was legitimate, the manner in which he did it was reprehensible. She instinctively acquired a dislike for this man.

Georgie broke her thread, mended it again, and assumed a look as though she were engrossed in what she was about, and paid no heed to the conversation.

"By the way," said Miss Chevalier, "my companion, Miss Thirkleby, informs me that there is a youth from Wellcombe, whence she also comes, who is a recruit, and perhaps may be under you. I do not know his name. What is it, Miss Thirkleby?"

"Samson Furze."

"Samson Furze," repeated the lady. "And as he comes out of the country and is suddenly transferred to a town, where he is sure to meet with temptations, Miss Thirkleby and I would be profoundly indebted to you if you would keep an eye upon him and administer to him occasional advice."

Georgie said not a word in agreement, although the captain looked at her for support to the request.

"It would be a good thing, would it not, Miss Thirkleby, if Captain le Gryce were to attend to the young man's morals?"

"I do not know Captain le Gryce sufficiently to pass an opinion," answered Georgie at the window, without raising her eyes from her work.

"He is a friend of mine, a personal friend," said the old lady, with a flush and a frown. Then she turned her seat so

as to present a shoulder to her companion, and became, if possible, more gracious to the officer.

"I should like—really—I should like to see you thoroughly interested in the Jews."

"I am afraid that their interest is rather in me."

"But I will fetch you a little work on prophecy in connection with Israel. You must promise me to read it, and then give me your candid opinion thereon, whether the arguments are not conclusive."

Miss Chevalier rose, and Captain le Gryce, seeing her make for the doorway, flew with alacrity to her assistance, and opened the door for her. The old lady gave a grunt of dissatisfaction. Miss Millward would have adjusted the barège shawl suitably about her shoulders.

Georgie, seeing the shawl was drawn on, did not think an alteration in the folds was necessary.

"The volume is upstairs; I will bring it down, and see whether I cannot make up as well a little packet of tracts for distribution among the recruits, if you will be good enough to see to their circulation."

"Certainly, Miss Chevalier. You have but to command and I to obey."

No sooner had she left the room than Le Gryce walked to the window, in the embrasure of which stood Georgie.

He had assumed a jaunty air, and his lips were smiling. She looked him directly in the face as he approached, and there was that in her eyes which made him drop his own momentarily.

But he pursued his course, and took up his position in the bay opposite to her.

She deliberately threaded a fine needle without further regarding him, and he observed how steady her hand was.

"If you had but asked me, I would have done that for you," he said, catching at anything as an excuse for opening conversation.

"When Hercules undertook the work of Omphale, he made himself a laughing-stock to all ages."

"You treat me with distrust," said the captain reproach-

fully. "I merely express my desire to be to you of some little service."

"Then kindly put coals on the fire."

The officer frowned, drew his lips together, but he did as he was bidden.

Then he returned into the embrasure and resumed his position over against the girl.

"Is this the first time you have been in Exeter?" he inquired softly.

"Yes."

"Do you like the town?"

"I have not seen enough of it to like or to dislike it," she answered carelessly.

"It is a city that is pleasant or tedious according to the society in which you move and the acquaintances that you make."

"A remark applicable to every place under the sun."

He was thrusting himself upon her. By a dexterous twist she escaped from the window and retreated into another.

Captain le Gryce at once followed her.

"Why do you run away?"

"I was in hopes of making my sojourn in Exeter pleasant by avoiding acquaintanceships that are not to my taste."

"Are you afraid of me?"

"Afraid! Oh, not a bit. There are other alternatives."

"You dislike me."

"I may need light and liberty to pursue my occupation."

"I must be grateful for that admission. But I cannot keep away. I am concerned to see one so beautiful and so quick as a mere companion to an old lady full of quirks."

"That is my affair, not yours."

"It is the right of every man of feeling to regret seeing a lovely girl in an irksome position."

"The only irksomeness I feel is in not having a window to myself," retorted Georgie.

His face, at which she did not look, worked with vexation.

"You are a thorn bush from the moors. Do your prickles tear every gentleman who approaches you with a compliment?"

"Whenever a man obtrudes his presence on me unsolicited and is too obtuse to perceive that it is so."

Captain le Gryce's face darkened with mortified vanity. He was specially incensed at the slight she had shown in rejecting the term "gentleman," and substituting for it the generic "man" in her reply.

"I have no doubt," said he, with rage in his voice that made it harsh and rasping, "I have no doubt in the world that Sir John Chevalier will meet with a different reception."

"I entirely agree with you, for he would have too much delicacy to act towards a defenceless girl in the manner you have done."

She looked him full in the eyes with steadiness. A glitter was in his stony orbs, and his lips curled and quivered with passion.

He turned sharply about, walked to the sofa, and seated himself with his back to the window, and snatched up a pamphlet, which he pretended to read.

A minute later Miss Chevalier entered and found that he had torn the book with his teeth.

"Oh," she exclaimed, before she had observed the havoc wrought, "you have been studying that most convincing pamphlet on the 'Number of the Beast.'"

"Devouring it, apparently," said Georgie.

Captain le Gryce looked round at her quickly with a gleam of wrath and threw the torn volume on the carpet.

"Captain," said Miss Chevalier, "I have been delayed by the arrival of a letter from John, my nephew. He is coming to Exeter. Will you dine with us to-morrow evening, and meet him?"

"Delighted to do so."

CHAPTER XXXVII

AN ADMONITION

"I AM sorry to have to mention it," said Miss Chevalier, settling her skirts, and putting aside the lacerated copy of the pamphlet on the "Number of the Beast," "I—I really feel it painful to allude to it, Miss Thirkleby, but I must beg you in future to treat my visitors with more consideration and with less tartness. It is not respectful to me to behave as you have done, and my comfort and feelings should be paramount with you. I could see that Captain le Gryce was offended. I had to leave the apartment, because I had promised him the loan of a book, and when I returned it was obvious to me that he was not himself; he had not recovered his equanimity since you administered to him that rebuff anent the recruit whom I had asked him to befriend."

"I am sorry indeed to have given you occasion to blame me," answered Georgie. "But the man ruffled me."

"The man, as you call him, is a captain in His Majesty's service," said Miss Chevalier, with severity, "and my friend."

"I repeat that I regret having spoken as I did—but he angered me, not only by the insolent manner in which he stared at me"—

"Stared at you!" interrupted the old lady. "He was quite incapable of doing anything of the sort."

"But especially," pursued the girl, "at the covert manner in which he poked fun at you, and attempted to make you ridiculous in my eyes."

"Poked fun at *me*! Tried to make *me* ridiculous!" repeated the old lady indignantly. "Miss Thirkleby, I am at a loss to understand you. I flatter myself that I am not a person against whom fun is ever poked. I never previously heard that there was in me anything that could appear ridiculous."

"I disliked his persiflage."

"You totally and radically misunderstood Captain le Gryce. He is as incapable of persiflage as I am unsuitable as an object for it. I have never, no, never had it intimated to me that anything of the sort has been attempted."

She raised herself, ruffled, and seating herself again, rearranged her silk skirts.

"Such a thought never entered the head of my poor friend Miss Millward. Captain le Gryce is engaged on really evangelistic work among the young soldiers of his regiment, acting under my direction and by my advice."

"I must have misconceived him," said Georgie drily.

"Wholly. And I am particularly desirous to cultivate a good feeling between him and my nephew. The captain has promised to endeavour to break him of his pernicious habit of smoking. It is of Babylon—lost Babylon—that it is said that the smoke went up for ever. I may add that Miss Millward highly appreciated the captain, and the latter was vastly averse to her being discharged."

"It shall not recur. When Captain le Gryce enters the room, I will leave it."

"So let it be. The matter may be considered as settled, and we will not recur to it. My nephew, Sir John Chevalier, is coming here this evening, and I will trouble you to see Sarah Jane about having his rooms made ready and the fire lighted."

Miss Thirkleby bowed and departed.

Having given the requisite orders, she retired to her room and was able there to indulge in tears.

She was not in a house in which she could be happy, nor with a lady to whom she could adapt herself. She was too truthful to flatter. Cant was offensive to her, to the last degree. She could not humour Miss Chevalier in her fancies

touching an object in which she had no faith nor towards which could feel sympathy.

But what was she to do?

How could she desert the post assigned to her? Or would it be right for her to so act as to give occasion to Miss Chevalier to dismiss her, when such dismissal would be infallibly followed by the recall of Miss Millward.

She had been brought up to encounter men, and men of not the most gallant manners, and it had become with her a second nature to fly to arms at their approach. Within a short space of time she had been measuring weapons with two soldiers, a private and his officer, and had disarmed both.

From the moment that Captain le Gryce had entered the drawing-room she had taken his measure. She conceived him to be a selfish and bad man, and was aware that he had noticed her with satisfaction and would take the first opportunity available to ingratiate himself with her. Having formed this opinion, her conduct towards him had been in accordance with it.

She understood how to deal with men of this sort, and was not afraid of them. But she was helpless how to fit herself to the atmosphere in which Miss Chevalier moved. She could not think her thoughts nor speak her tongue.

The sailor and the bargee have their language made up of expletives, partly profane and partly obscene. They mean to be neither blasphemous nor indecent, but they use the words which have become to them a vehicle for the expression of their emotions, without attaching definite ideas to them. It is much the same with a certain body of professedly pious persons. Their conversation is garnished with Scripture flourish and cant terminology which become their dialect, and which they employ without giving to their words the real force which they were intended to convey. Georgie felt that to be true to herself she could not acquire, would not attempt to acquire, this mode of diction. The utmost she could do would be to restrain herself so as not to show how her gorge rose against it.

She had much to trouble her. She could not shake off the

distress of mind caused by feeling that she had unwittingly deceived Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt. He might never know it. That mattered not. In her own eyes she was lowered.

She repeated to herself that she had committed no moral fault, because she was ignorant that the manuscript was in her box when she gave him her word of honour that it was not there. The fact remained that he had trusted her, and had been deceived.

She had done a dishonourable act without dishonourable intent.

She resolved to write full particulars to Mrs. Weldon and to ask her to explain the circumstances to Sir Thomas. And till this had been done she could not be easy.

She was further concerned that Sir John Chevalier was arriving, and would occupy the two rooms on the ground floor. It was in the inner of the two, in the library, that the manuscript was concealed.

What if he were by any chance to pull out the case labelled *Introduction to a Godly Life*, and were to light on the "Revelations of a Man about Court?" Was it not likely that he might have papers he desired to stow away, and that knowing of the false volume, would take it forth for his own purpose?

She descended the staircase with intent to remove the budget and find for it some other receptacle. But she saw that the rooms were taken possession of by the housemaids, laying the fire, dusting, and making the bed. It was not possible for her at that time to abstract the packet. She must await her opportunity.

Next she resolved on the purchase of a small iron case with a barrel padlock, the case not so light that it could be easily carried off, and yet not too heavy for her to lift about.

She put on her bonnet and went into the town, and at an ironmonger's found the article that was desired, provided herself with a padlock, and received full instructions as to its use.

The box was too cumbersome for her to carry, and the shopkeeper undertook to send it to the address she gave, if not on that evening, then assuredly the following morning.

The errand boy was out on a round, and there was no assurance when he would be back. Georgie replied that although she particularly desired the box that evening, yet prompt delivery in the morning might suffice.

This accomplished, she hurried homewards. Instead of remaining in the house, she went into the garden. She was accustomed to fresh air, and felt as though she were suffocated unless out of doors a good deal.

Sir John had arrived whilst she was in the town; she noticed his hat and overcoat in the hall. The servants had moved his portmanteau or valise into his bedroom, and were now unstrapping it, as she perceived through the doorway, the door not being shut.

Partly because she did not desire to intrude and form a third when the young baronet met his aunt, and partly because she desired more exercise, she went into the garden.

The long windows of the parlour commanded it, and as she chanced to look up she saw Sir John at one of them. He noticed her, and at once turned and left it; and about ten minutes later he was advancing towards her along the gravel walk.

A little doubtful whether she were the object of his quest, she continued her stroll, but he quickened his steps, and caught her up. Then, at once, she met him with a pleased and respectful salutation.

"Miss Thirkleby," said the young man, extending his hand, "I have a bushel of kind words and friendly greetings to discharge into your lap, from all at Wellcombe. And I bear also messages of gratitude from my sister and brother-in-law, who are settled into your house, and daily bless your name for having come to their aid when in a sore dilemma. The house would be everything that could be desired if only the mistress were there. Then it would indeed be delightful."

"I am not going back to Wellcombe," replied Georgie, but without the resolution in her tone that had been employed formerly. And she added, "At least for a while."

"I believe you will have the Wellcombians coming after you with their clothes rent and with ashes on their heads, to entreat you to return. I can tell you, if you like, the secret

history of that affair which caused you so much annoyance. My aunt had a difficulty in finding it out. The people, naturally enough, were reticent. But Alse Grylls and Rebecca got at the bottom of it. You must not take the matter to heart. You positively must return."

"But, sir, whom am I to leave in my place with Miss Chevalier?"

"There is the rub. You are laying us under an obligation. We had a call from Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, and he sent his kindest regards to you when he heard that I was likely to see you, and quoted in reference to you something from, I think, the *Two Gentlemen of Verona*—

> 'Home-keeping youth have ever homely wits.
> They living dully sluggardis'd at home,
> Wear out their youth with shapeless idleness'—

or words to that effect. And he said that an *excursus* into the world and a look upon other aspects of life would do you a vast amount of good. Well, I saw you from the window, and I ran down, first and foremost to relieve myself of the many messages wherewith I was commissioned, and next because I want a word with you relative to my aunt. I find that there have been some recent ruffles connected with the visit of Captain le Gryce."

"It was nothing of much importance. I spoke to him sharply. It is my nature to, as Doctor Watts says of the fighting propensities of dogs."

"He did something to provoke you?"

"He was, I thought, turning your aunt into ridicule, and I let him understand that I did not like it."

"Was that so? What about?"

"Oh, her schemes of putting the Jews in a body into an old clo' bag, shaking them together, and sending them to the promised land."

"Now it is you who are laughing at her."

"No—no, only at the project."

"And perhaps it was only at the chimerical project that Le Gryce laughed. Old maids must occupy their minds and

their hearts on something. If they have not children on whom to pour out that wealth of tenderness and solicitude which the Almighty has given to woman, they find some other object. It may be that a broader sphere is watered by their charity. That tract of land over which it flows is possibly unfertile, yet it may richly repay the healthy, loving flood. Perhaps my aunt may waste her charity on an absurdity, but respect the prompting of a heart that seeks to do good. So Le Gryce laughed at this repatriation scheme. I feared he had been offering you some impertinence. If anything of that sort should occur speak to me and I shall take good care that it does not happen again."

"I make no complaint of anything of that sort, nor shall I —I am able to defend myself."

"Is it well to do so yourself, when there are others willing and ready to battle for you?"

Georgie paused a moment, then said, "My uncle never stood between me and the fellows that frequented his table. He left me to employ my natural powers of defence."

"But he is no more. The occasion is past. You will meet with no more Hulletts and Daveys. Mr. Weldon and I will always screen you from insolence. It is the duty of every gentleman to do so, and—excuse me if I say what may seem rude—it will be more becoming. It is painful to a man of right feeling to see a woman unprotected, battling in her own defence."

Georgie was silent a while, and her eyes filled. After a moment's consideration she said "Yes"—she could say no more.

"It would be better for her not to show fight, but to run away," added Sir John. "You could not help it—you had to protect yourself, you poor, lonely child; but, I speak sincerely, and from the depth of my heart, the necessity is at an end. Rely henceforth on my brother-in-law and me."

"I thank you," she answered; she could not speak more words than that, for her heart swelled. Such true kindness was in the young man's tone that she accepted the implied reproach without resentment.

They walked on side by side, and he did not further address

her. He saw that she was moved. Presently, when she had gained some control over herself, she said, "I am, what Captain le Gryce said, a thorn tree."

"But the thorn covers itself with a snow of flowers that veil the thorns," answered Sir John.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

CAUGHT

ON the following morning Georgie impatiently looked out for an opportunity to get hold of the "Revelations." During the night she had been unable to sleep. She had tossed on her bed, troubled with many thoughts. Fears that were trifling by day swelled in the darkness into nightmares and rolled over her, deluging her with terror. What if Sir John were to find the manuscript and were to sit over his fire reading it? What if Sarah Jane or Elizabeth Anne, when about to light the fire, had pulled down the case and had taken thence the budget, and ere she tore it for kindling purposes had detected what secret it contained and had conveyed it to the kitchen, there to be spread out and read by the cook, Thomas, Eliza, and all the underground folk. She fancied that she heard their exclamations of astonishment and their bursts of laughter.

Then her mind recurred to the slight reproof she had received from Sir John. She thought it over, and convinced herself that it was undeserved. How was she to allow either Mr. Weldon or Sir John to take up the cudgels on her behalf? —how, when the former was miles away and the latter but a rare visitor?

Moreover, she had no right to requisition either of them as a champion. She was perfectly equipped for self-defence. Heaven, Providence, or whatever it was that had thrust her into the world, had armed her with a sufficient wit and with a sharp tongue. She knew how to set a man down by a toss of the chin, a glance of an eye, a motion of the hand, or, as a

last resource, with the launching of a word. A hedgehog has bristles, a sepia discharges a purple cloud, an electric eel gives a paralysing shock. Was she less well furnished than these creatures? To call man to her aid was a confession of incapacity, and, worse than that, laid a woman under an obligation to her protector. As Farmer Furze said, "Wimmin was born to make onpleasantness, and they did it." If Susie Furze could be disagreeable where it was necessary, why not she? She would be no timorous hare, no sensitive plant, no scared pigeon.

When morning arrived—raw, grey, wretched, with a drizzle and a chill south-east wind—she rose in utter wretchedness, resolved to take the manuscript from its hiding-place as soon as was possible.

But it was not easy for her to find occasion to enter the captain's cabin.

After Sir John had left it for breakfast, she scanned his face with anxiety to see whether she could decipher in it evidence that he had found the papers. But his aspect was cheerful, and no token was traceable that he had read the manuscript that she was so anxious to keep from every eye.

After he had left his room it was given over to the housemaids. They had to make the bed, to rake out the ashes from the grate and to relay the fire, to brush the carpet, and to refill the water-jug and bottle.

Georgie descended several times to the hall, and looked at them; indeed she did this so often that the two girls noticed it, glanced at each other, and said something in a low tone to one another. She felt that it concerned her. They had detected in her either a desire to enter the captain's cabin, or an undue interest in the comfort of Sir John.

Alarmed, with a mounting colour, she retreated. The iron box she had ordered had not arrived. She put on her bonnet and shawl and took an umbrella, then went forth, in spite of the rain, through the red mud to the ironmonger's, to be assured that it had been despatched an hour ago.

On her return she instituted inquiries, and was then informed that it had been delivered, and was lying in the scullery. The servants had not supposed that it was in

immediate requisition; they had been busy, and had had no time to carry it up to her room.

When Georgie had removed her bonnet and damp shawl, and had stood the dripping umbrella to drain, she discovered that Sir John was in his room. He had left the drawing-room, with an apology to his aunt that he had letters to attend to and some business with his steward to regulate, and had withdrawn to his own series of apartments.

In the afternoon Miss Chevalier took the girl out for a drive with her, and to make one or two formal calls.

In the evening Sir John was dressing for dinner, and thus it came about that during the day Georgie had found no means of removing the document from its place of concealment to her iron box.

Presently Captain le Gryce arrived.

The girl was in the drawing-room, that was well lighted with wax candles. There was a good deal of cut glass in the room, that sparkled.

She was dressed for the evening in black silk, her throat and bust bare, with some fine old lace edging the dress. Her dark hair was rolled back in waves, it was abundant and glossy. Her face was pale. Sleeplessness had made her eyes unusually lustrous, for it had drawn blue rings about them, and the azure veins in her temples showed. The lashes of her lids were long and silky, sweeping her cheek, and the brows were finely drawn and arched.

She did not know, what was obvious even to Miss Chevalier, that she was extraordinarily lovely. And if the old lady perceived this, it may well be supposed that the two gentlemen were alive to the fact. It was a fact that gratified Miss Chevalier, for it reflected credit on herself for having in her house one who was beautiful.

Sir John received Captain le Gryce with civility, but, as Georgie thought, without cordiality.

The captain greeted the hostess with effusion, herself with a distant bow; but, as he bowed, his black saturnine eyes raked her, and she was conscious that they menaced her, that there was ill-will and mischief in them. Instinctively she felt that he only waited his opportunity for repaying her for the treat-

ment he had received at her hands. Yet along with this there was unmistakable admiration.

"Will you take my aunt to dinner?" asked Sir John, and he offered his arm to Georgie. The baronet turned to her as they descended the stairs, and said, "We will have a chat about Wellcombe. I have been too much engaged all day to see you. I like the place. In a little while I shall get to love it."

"Yet you have seen it only in winter."

"And without its queen."

They descended the stairs. She hung on his arm, and was happy.

"Do you know," she said, "that I left the place hating it, and now I have come to feel a sort of ache in my heart, as if I really must have been fond of it, and my conscience tells me I shall have no rest till I have made my peace with it. I was a little nasty hedgehog there."

"You were a hedgehog only because surrounded by snarling dogs. There is no more need for prickles."

"We will talk of Wellcombe, and not of myself," said Georgie.

At dinner the conversation at times became general, but not for long. Captain le Gryce incessantly endeavoured to draw the baronet and Georgie into the main current, and Sir John was quite willing as host that so it should be; but Miss Chevalier was determined to engross the attention of the captain, and fill his ear with her schemes for the repatriation of the Jews and with accounts of an agent on that behalf—a Rev. Emmanuel Hirsch, who was coming to meet some select friends and well-wishers to the cause at her house, when there would be a conversazione. She tried hard to induce the captain to promise not only himself to attend, but also to bring some of the officers of the regiment.

Sir John, taking advantage of the occasion, spoke to Georgie about Wellcombe. He had seen and made great friends with Granny Grylls. He had noticed peculiarities of the people in the place. He hit off Captain Davey and Squire Hullett with such comic effect that Georgie laughed. Her eye kindled, her face lighted up, her colour rose, and she heard none of

the conversation carried on between Captain le Gryce and the hostess, nor did she notice the hard eyes that at intervals fixed themselves upon her.

Again and again did Sir John endeavour to interest his aunt and the captain in his description, but the former invariably drew off and resumed her talk with Le Gryce about prophecy and the restoration of the Hebrews. Georgie forgot everything in the delight of the moment, and was so absorbed in what was told, that she did not catch at once the movement of the hostess for adjournment to the drawing-room.

No sooner did the ladies retire, than Georgie thought that the longed-for opportunity had come.

The servants were engaged in the kitchen, the gentlemen were sitting over their wine in the dining-room, and Miss Chevalier was groping for a text on the drying up of the tongue of the Egyptian Sea, in connection with the restoration of the Jews.

Now was the chance for her to recover the manuscript.

Making some trivial excuse to Miss Chevalier, with fluttering heart she left the room and went downstairs softly.

No one was in the hall, that was lighted by a pendant lamp.

Sir John's door was open, and she saw the flicker of the fire in his bedroom.

At once she entered, and passed through the cabin into the library beyond. In that the grate was cold, and when she entered she found that the room was dark.

She left the door ajar, so as to allow some of the ruddy light from the coal fire to enter it, so that she might find her way.

She knew where the bookcase was, and she thought she knew on which shelf was the false volume.

She put up her hand to the books and groped. By the touch she could not distinguish the backs. She would have run her fingers along the tops, expecting to feel the difference between leaves and pasteboard, but the shelf was situated too high up for her to reach above the books. The light was insufficient to enable her to read the titles, and it was not only insufficient but by its flicker it was deceptive.

IN A MOMENT HE HAD TWIRLED THE CA[illegible] OF [illegible] HAND

She was therefore compelled to draw out volume after volume, not wholly, but enough to allow her with the free hand to tap the side and distinguish between a book and a case.

The third book that she withdrew from its place on the shelf was the box that she required. It was heavy—it had not been opened and robbed.

But at the same moment that she had it in her hands she heard voices—those of the gentlemen, and a streak of yellow light struck into the room. Escape was impossible.

"Here, Le Gryce, we will sip our port in my snuggery and have our cigars by my fire. My aunt does not like the fumes of tobacco."

"Let us go into the library," said the captain.

"The fire is not lit there," replied Sir John. "But we will put a match to it, and have it up in a jiffy. The room is not cold."

"And then the dear old lady will not smell our smoke," said Le Gryce.

At the words he threw the door open and entered, uttered an exclamation, and said mockingly, "I have smoked something already."

The baronet followed, carrying a pair of silver candlesticks. He saw Georgie standing irresolute, having lost her presence of mind, frightened, and holding the sham volume aloft.

"Of a literary turn. Getting a book!" said Le Gryce, and in a moment had twirled the case out of her hand. "Oh ho! *Introduction to a Godly Life.* I fear I interrupt a study given by a professor—and with illustrations."

"Give me back the book!" said Georgie hoarsely.

"Captain," said Sir John, putting down the candlesticks, "be so good as at once to return the volume which my aunt has sent Miss Thirkleby to bring to her."

"It does not seem to me to be a book," said the captain.

"Whatever it be, be so good as to return it," said Sir John angrily, "and suffer Miss Thirkleby to pass without comment."

"Comment in such a case is superfluous," retorted Le Gryce, flushing at the imperious tone assumed by the baronet. "As

the young lady is under your protection, she can come and go where she likes."

"This is an outrage!"

"Pardon me, a legitimate inference."

Georgie snatched the case from his hand, and made her escape. Captain le Gryce laughed. "Do not be angry, old fellow," said he. "I have given her something in return for some nasty stabs she dealt me. Now the account between us is cleared."

"That may or may not be," said Sir John sternly, "but a new account has been opened between you and me."

"What do you mean?"

"That I cannot pass over an impertinence offered to a young lady."

"Bah!—a domestic servant."

"A young lady," repeated Sir John, with emphasis.

"As you will," retorted Le Gryce. "I will meet your account with steel or lead as you choose, which is quite indifferent to me. You will oblige me by making my excuses to Miss Chevalier, and—I remain at your service."

CHAPTER XXXIX

LE GRYCE'S BOOTS

"BE so good as to pull off my boots."

Samson Furze put one knee to the ground, and laid hold of the leg of Captain le Gryce.

"By the way," said the latter, "when did you become acquainted with the young woman at Miss Chevalier's in Northernhaye?"

"Which, sir?—the parlour-maid, or the lady's maid, her as rolls her eyes? The cook is over five-and-thirty, and I don't call her young."

"I mean her who has been taken on as companion, or reader, or housekeeper."

"Oh! the young lady."

"Lady, if you like—what is her name?"

"Miss Georgie Thirkleby."

"Ah! to be sure—I remember. How did you get to know her?"

"I have known her a purty number o' years, sir, up to Wellcombe."

"I suppose a village doctor's daughter?"

"No, captain, sir! Niece to our vicar. He as is dead."

"And she is cast adrift. Well?"

"She and I was nigh upon brought up together."

"What! you in a girls' school with her, or she as a fellow-scholar in a boys' academy with you?"

"Neither, sir."

Samson lugged at the boot and got it off.

"Not that, sir," he said shyly and awkwardly. "But in a

little out-of-the-way village young folk can't help seeing much of one another. She was a daring rider and always went after the hounds."

"And is now in service to the old lady. You have occasion to congratulate yourself, Furze; an uncommonly pretty girl has been inquiring after you, and laying on me injunctions respecting you."

"Miss Georgie?"

Samson rose to his feet, holding the boot in his hand, purple to the temples and with his nostrils dilated.

"She never did other than give me bitter words," he said, after a pause, as the captain observed him with an amused and contemptuous smile.

"This time," said Le Gryce, "she has been urgent with me, as she learned that you were in attendance upon me, that I should look after your welfare, see that you read your Bible, and wear dry socks."

"Miss Georgie never said that!" Samson's eyelids flickered. "She never heeded me a snap of the fingers."

"But this does not look like disregard, does it, my man?"

Furze stood gazing broodingly into the boot. He shook his head.

"Of course, if your honour says she did speak them words"—

"I do not say that. I cannot give you her exact expressions. But a good deal was implied. Her modesty induced her to get the old lady to speak on her behalf. I suppose there have been some love passages between you."

Again Samson shook his head. "We have had passages t'other way on. I boxed her ears, and she shot me."

"With Cupid's arrow, through the heart?"

"No, no. She put a leaden slug into me. It struck my rib and glanced about and came out near the spine. That is to say, Doctor Furlong took it out. It were lodged there."

"The deuce!"

Captain le Gryce burst out laughing.

"Your methods of courting and responding to advances are peculiar at—what is the place?"

"Wellcombe. There was not much courtin' done," said Samson. "Leastways none on her side. But I always liked her, and I shouldn't ha' enlisted but all along of she. She wouldn't have me, and I were ashamed to go home after that."

"And now she has run after you to Exeter."

"That, sir, is a chance. If only she'd have me now, I'd get father to buy me out."

"My dear fellow, she won't have you. Do not think of it. It was my nonsense to suggest that she had come here in pursuit of you. She is not a morsel for a private, but a mouthful for someone else."

Furze lifted his head, and with a sullen expression looked questioningly into the captain's face.

"I will tell you what brought her here. No, Furze, she was not running after you. Put that out of your head. Someone else contrived the bringing of her here, and that for his own purposes."

"It was the parson's doing."

"It was not the parson's doing—or, if he had a finger in it, that was because he was employed as an intermediary. He who schemed it was the old lady's nephew. The young baronet has an eye for a comely face, and, by Jove, he has picked out a beauty this time." Le Gryce laughed. "And to think of his putting her into a house of Mademoiselle Piety. It's an amazing piece of impudence."

"What do you mean, sir?"

"Mean! Oh, no words are needed to convey to you what I mean. He has taken a fancy to the pretty wench."

"The young lady?"

"To this Miss Georgie of yours. And he has picked a quarrel with me about her. I was unfortunate; I interrupted one of their love passages."

Samson Furze's colour came and went. He trembled with passion; and the captain noticed his condition.

"You do not seem to love him, Furze. Well, he and I are

likely to meet before the twenty-four hours have elapsed, either with pistols or swords."

"Take swords," said Samson. His face was red as blood, and his hands clenched convulsively. "He made a laughing-stock of me with foils before the ladies. I would have killed him then, but I could not reach him."

"I am not likely to choose weapons to suit you, Furze," said the captain. "For the matter of that, I believe the initiative lies with me, and he will have the choice of tools. I have told you this, young fellow," continued Le Gryce, "because I want you to have my portmanteau packed and ready in case I have to make a bolt, should I chance to run him through the liver or send a bolt into his heart. Not a word of this to anyone. Mind you that! Get everything ready quietly. I do not want to kill him, my purpose is merely to prick him; but in such meetings it is not possible to calculate, and one must be prepared for contingencies. So—she shot you once!"

"It was an accident. She did not intend to do it, but, when it was done, she never troubled her head about me to ask if I were dead or alive."

Samson repeated his old grievance. It was one to which he recurred daily.

The human mind is incessantly active. Where action is not, there is no mind. Some brains move more tardily than do others, but all are in revolution more or less quickly.

The ground over which they turn, the material upon which they work, differ. The man of experience and education has both a large circuit in which his mind may travel, and also much material which it can grind.

But the man of neither experience nor education has but a small orbit and little material for his mind to work upon. The consequence with the latter is not that his brain gives up action, but that it rotates over the same ground, and crushes up the same subject-matter over and over with such iteration that it is incessantly deepening its groove and steeping itself in that which it has pounded. This constitutes prejudice.

We are disposed to marvel at the retentive memories

of the uncultured. This recollective accuracy is not extraordinary, for, owing to the scantiness of ideas supplied to the brain, it turns those few grains over and over again till it has assimilated them.

Samson Furze was a man of limited education and small knowledge of things in general. Consequently he had little more than his grievances and his farm experiences to occupy his thoughts. His brain was sluggish but retentive.

"Get on with my boot, Furze. My right foot is larger than the left. Haul at the heel."

Then, after a pause, "So—a parson's niece. I suppose he died and left her nothing."

"The manor and lordship of Wellcombe and about thirty or forty thousand pounds."

"What!" Le Gryce raised his brows and dropped his jaw.

"If it is not hers now it will be hers soon. Nobody knows how much money there is. They do say that there be piles of bank-notes and cases of jewels and a whole room full of silver plate."

"You do not mean it!"

"Yes, captain, it is true; Captain Davey saw it all. He and Squire Hullett were disposed to dispute her rights, but Sir Thomas, for sure, will see her through."

"Who is Sir Thomas?"

"Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, the Warden of the Stannaries."

"What—the Black Rod?"

"I don't know nothing of that, sir; but I know that he is a great man with the king, and he was—so they tell—terrible intimate with him when he were Prince of Wales."

"Then why the deuce is she here in a menial capacity?"

"I don't know, sir, but she has lent the Manor House to the new vicar."

Captain le Gryce rubbed his chin.

"Are you getting my boot off?" he asked. "You don't seem to move it. The heel sticks. Has she no relations alive? No mother?"

"I have heard tell that her mother died long ago."

"And her father, of course, is dead. Did he leave her the Manor House?"

"He?—oh no! He's not dead."

"Where does he live? What is he?"

Samson let go the boot and looked up into the face of the captain.

"The king, sir."

Le Gryce did not understand.

"Come," said he impatiently. "You are paying no attention to my boot. Go on working it. Who is her father?"

"His Gracious Majesty."

"What the devil do you mean?"

The captain stared at the private, with some anger in his eyes. He thought that the fellow was impertinent, and was making fun of him.

"It is as I say, sir."

Furze looked doggedly down and devoted himself to the boot, and finally succeeded in freeing the heel.

"Confound you, you ass! What do you mean?"

"She is the daughter of His Most Gracious Majesty, George the Fourth, whose livery we wear."

"Are you gone crazed?"

"No, sir; we called her the Royal Georgie. I don't fancy all was quite straight about her birth. But there can be no mistake that she is the daughter of the king, and folk say that her mother was sister to our late vicar, but he would never own to that. He was chaplain to the Prince of Wales before he was sent to Wellcombe. And I reckon when at court, the prince, as he was then, saw and took a fancy to his sister. But at Wellcombe we knew nought for certain. Still, all say it."

Forgetful that he had one boot half off, Captain le Gryce started to his feet and limped about the room.

"It is an Arabian Nights tale."

"No, sir, it is the Wellcombe story."

"And does Sir John Chevalier know this?"

"Oh yes, captain. He! Of course he does; it is known to Parson Weldon and Mrs. Weldon."

"By Jove! Now I understand his object. What a fool have I made of myself! Had I but known this before, I

might— But I supposed—I don't know what I thought. Curse me! I have thrown away a chance, and hang me! if I kill him I shall have to run out of the country. If I pink him the house will be closed to me. If he were but out of the way I could easily get on terms again with the old lady. But the whole thing is inexplicable. If she be what you say, why is she at Miss Chevalier's? You seem to know a good deal, Furze."

"There was a bit of disturbance at Wellcombe. The people there don't half like her. You see we object to have a king's daughter among us to act as a spy on behalf of the duchy."

"And she has been living with her uncle the parson?"

"Yes, sir. Folk say, that is, they have heard Captain Davey say, as how the king did not care terrible to have her at court, seeing he was married to Queen Caroline."

"I see—and so sent her into the country."

"That is what they say, and what Captain Davey says."

"And you thought, you, a country clown, to marry her?" Le Gryce laughed.

Furze gave a sign of assent.

"By heaven! What presumption! Why, he who gets that girl may calculate surely on promotion in whatever profession he be in. I suppose Chevalier thought he might secure a peerage. He should be content with his baronetcy. It is the needy beggars, who have no interest, and no family, and no money, that must work their way up, by laying hold of such catches as this. Sir John shall never have her."

"Never," repeated Furze.

Le Gryce turned, looked at the young soldier, and laughed contemptuously.

"So, your parents were keen to mate you to a king's daughter! That would have read like a fairy tale, had it succeeded."

"At first they were against it," said Samson. "My father is the biggest yeoman in Wellcombe, and she—well, she wasn't born respectable like."

"A king's daughter not respectable enough in birth to mate with a farmer's son! This is a rare joke."

"But when mother heard that she had the manor"—

"She was inclined to overlook the bar sinister." Captain le Gryce cast himself into his chair, laughing. "Pull again. But, Furze, put out of your head all thoughts of that young lady. The Royal Georgie is not for you."

"Nor for Sir John."

"Nor for Sir John," repeated Le Gryce. "But, Furze, I shan't fight him—I will send an apology, and you shall take it."

CHAPTER XL

AN EARLY CALLER

"MY dear, what would you like?"

Miss Chevalier was at the breakfast table. Her question met with no response.

"Georgina dear, would you prefer coffee or tea?"

"I beg your pardon," exclaimed the girl, starting in surprise. "I had no idea you were addressing me. I thought you spoke to the cat or the canary."

As she looked at the old lady she observed a notable change in her expression. Hitherto Miss Chevalier had addressed her formally, and had treated her distantly and coldly.

"I will take what is on the table," said Georgie, in some bewilderment.

"If there is anything you have a mind to," said the old maid, "have it. There is brawn on the side. Perhaps you would like some of the cold chicken served up. If so—I will ring."

"No—please not."

What did this change in the manner of the lady signify?

"It is so good of you to come to me," pursued the latter, "so kind, so self-denying, I shall be eternally indebted to you. Miss Millward was a very worthy person, but she had no blood."

"No blood!" Georgie's bewilderment continued. "Surely that might have been remedied with tincture of steel sucked through a straw, to save the teeth."

"No, I do not mean *that*—no family."

"I did not know you liked children about the place. Besides"—

"You are so funny this morning. I refer to ancestry."

"But I have none."

"Oh, I know about that," said Miss Chevalier, with a smile. "A little bird has been whispering in my ear. That is to say, Thomas, my lady's maid, has told me something."

"What can that woman know about me?" asked Georgie, colouring.

"Oh, news flies. There was a man here—a private—the youth you spoke to Captain le Gryce about, or I—which was it?—and he has given them in the kitchen some information about you."

"I object to having back-stairs tattle brought against me."

The girl rose, very greatly annoyed, and walked to the window. The breakfast-room was upstairs, on the same landing as the parlour. The window was long, like those in the drawing-room.

"If that fellow dares to come here again, Miss Chevalier, I trust you will instruct the servants not to admit him. It is painful to me to have my concerns discussed in the kitchen."

"Do not call me Miss Chevalier—I am Louisa. Intimate friends and relations call me Louie."

"I am neither, and am not so privileged."

"Intimate you are, as you are in my house and in close relations with me. Let us not be distant. I like you. I even prefer you to Miss Millward."

The girl standing in the window and looking out to hide her vexation, turned and bowed.

"I may assume that it is true?" began the old lady inquisitively.

"That *what* is true?"

"The distinguished origin given to you."

Georgina did not answer. She tapped with her fingers against the pane. She was as perplexed as she was annoyed.

Miss Chevalier paused in breathless expectation. Receiving no reply, she asked fawningly, "Did you have the happiness of knowing your dear mother?"

"No, I had not, madam."

"But you have seen your illustrious father?"

Again Georgie was embarrassed for an answer. She held that she had seen him. She recalled the interview, when she was a little girl, with the stout gentleman of many waistcoats. Not knowing what reply to make, she made none at all.

Miss Chevalier chuckled and rubbed her bemittened hands.

"Of course, my dear, things happen that we may wish were different, things for which we are very sorry, and which cannot, taken on the whole, be justified. Still—royalty must not be measured in common scales. Then, again, it all happened so long ago, and has doubtless been repented. We have to accept facts and to make the best of them. It is not for us to constitute ourselves the judges of others. Now that you have attained to womanhood, and are so blooming and beautiful, and altogether so fascinating, I have no doubt that you will be summoned to court. When there, you may be of the greatest service."

"Service," repeated the girl, "to whom and to what?"

"Oh, my dear Georgina—it is not for me to indicate what you should do. All I can propose to myself is to show what might be done by one with your advantages of birth."

"Advantages of birth!"

"Well, it is an advantage to have the blood royal in one's veins, even if there be a slight irregularity in its course. And with your engaging manners, you might become quite an apostle to the cause."

"What cause?"

"That of the 'Repatriation of the Jews,' and the 'Fulfilment of Prophecy.' We shall have a little preliminary conversazione—a public meeting. I burn to interest you in the cause. The Reverend Emmanuel Hirsch, a converted Hebrew, will be present and explain the movement. The dean—Dean Hedges, you know—I expect him; and the Honourable Mrs. Hornblower will be present. She takes the matter warmly to heart. She has not herself subscribed, but she urges all her friends to contribute, and this, if done anonymously, goes to her credit. Then there is Miss Bilbie coming. She is very keen in the matter now, but we cannot calculate on her, she is volatile in her interests. Now it is

Jews, to-morrow it may be cats. Mrs. Winterbourne has intimated her intention to be present. She has something internal the matter with her. We all trust that she may leave a large bequest to the cause."

"But why do you require so much money?"

"Oh, my dear! if the Jews are to be sent back to their own land, it must be made worth their while to go. They must be indemnified for their businesses they give up. You can hardly expect them to abandon their shops and their professions without our making it up to them in some form. Then, again, there will be the expense of chartering vessels for the voyage. Also we shall have to purchase land and dwellings for them in Palestine. Prophecy requires that they should each sit under their own vine and fig tree. So we shall have to engage labourers to cultivate the land for them, and grow the vines and fig trees for them to sit under."

"Do you want me to go round rattling a collecting box under people's noses?"

"No, not unless you are particularly zealous. I thought—but it must be left to you. If you should be at court and have the ear of great personages—I will name no names—you might seize the occasion to persuade that a British man-of-war should be sent to convoy the flotilla of returning Jews; it would be such a feature, and would so redound to the honour of the British flag."

"You must not calculate on me," said Georgie.

"Oh no, dearest, not calculate; but in the event"—

"I am not yet summoned to court, so it is of no use thinking what may be done when I am."

The girl was greatly annoyed at her story having got out among the domestics, and she knew now that it would become common property among all classes.

Her position was anomalous and painful. If she were questioned about her parentage she could not deny her knowledge concerning it. With the letters and other papers in her possession left by her uncle, she had it in her power to establish conclusively who she was.

Miss Chevalier respected her silence.

She sat unruffling her dress, and smiling and fixing Georgie

with twinkling eyes, till the prolonged break in the conversation became awkward.

Then she said, "My nephew breakfasted in his own room early. He had to drive into the country. But I expect him back in the course of the morning. Whether he can be induced to attend my little gathering, I do not know—but I hardly expect it."

The door opened and the maid looked in.

"If you please, miss, you are wanted."

"Who, I?" asked Georgie.

"Yes, miss. Someone in the hall wishes to speak with you."

"Who is it?"

"Private Furze, if you please, miss."

Georgina frowned.

"Tell him to go away. I will not see him."

"Please, miss, he says as how he has got something to deliver into your hands only."

"I do not care. I am engaged. I will not see him. The man is a pest."

"My dear," said Miss Chevalier, "do not take the trouble to go downstairs. Let the man be shown up here, into the breakfast-room, and you can pour him out a cup of coffee."

"No, no!" from Georgina hastily.

"I insist," pursued the old lady. "I really wish that you should be saved the inconvenience of descending to the hall."

"I will go to him at once," said the girl, and she swung out of the room.

CHAPTER XLI

IN THE HALL

SHE descended the staircase with her hand sliding down the banister, her face moody and her lips compressed. She was greatly annoyed at the persistence of the young man in coming again to the house, and especially angry with him for giving rein to his tongue in the servants' hall about her history.

She saw him awaiting her in his uniform, with his sheathed bayonet at his side.

"Well," she said, as she reached the last step of the stairs, but did not leave it, "well, here to worry me once more. I forbade you to come to Miss Chevalier's house and ask after me. I object to your frequenting the kitchen, and detailing there the tittle-tattle of Wellcombe. This is not a public-house."

"I have come because sent."

"Prithee, who sent you?"

"Captain le Gryce."

"It is a piece of impertinence that I resent. I have nothing to do with that personage."

"Miss Georgie, he has given me a letter to present to you. I was to deliver it into your hands. And I have another for Sir John Chevalier, that I am to give to none but himself. He is out, they tell me, so I must wait for his return. I act under orders, and am bound to obey."

"Well, give me the letter addressed to myself."

She did not quit the step, and Furze had to advance across the hall so as to present the note to her.

She took it from him with an impatient gesture, tore it open, and hastily scanned the contents. It contained a fulsome apology for discourtesy offered on the previous evening.

"Any answer, miss?"

Then there came a ring at the front door bell. Thereupon, the door being opened, a stiff-bodied, middle-aged lady appeared, with hair puffed out and two great bows, one on each side of her face. She had a Roman nose and flourished an enormous umbrella.

When she had divested herself, or been divested of her wraps by the maid, she extended the umbrella towards Georgie and asked, "Who is that?"

"Please, ma'am, Miss Thirkleby."

"Who?"

"Miss Thirkleby, please."

The lady looked at Georgie, then at the soldier, and then back again at the girl, looked her up and down, curry-combing her with her hard eyes.

She expected Georgie to descend from the step and give to her the entire width of the staircase by which to ascend.

Georgie contented herself with drawing back against the wall, allowing ample room for two persons to pass her, running in harness abreast. But this did not satisfy the visitor. She gave her name, ostensibly, to the maid. "The Honourable Mrs. Hornblower!" laying emphasis on the title. The servant knew the visitor well, but the information was afforded for the overawing of Georgie. The lady had been twice married, and her first husband had been the son of a baron, but the second, Mr. Hornblower, was a retired man of business. However, she carried on the title, as a balance from a former account transferred to the second.

As Georgie did not vacate her position, but slightly bowed, the lady stalked up the stairs, snorting indignantly, looking straight before her and ignoring Georgie's bow.

The girl waited till the honourable lady had been announced and admitted into the drawing-room, and then, holding the letter, said to Furze, "An answer wanted? I do not reply to letters of this sort. Hah! your master's spelling is hardly what might be expected. Address has not usually one 'd'

in English, whatever it may have in French. My name is not quite right, but that is no matter. And I see that *deceive* has got its vowels inverted. I will correct the misspelling and send back the letter by you. You may tell your master to copy each word out fifty times till he has mastered their orthography."

She placed the note against the wall and was about with a pencil to do as she had said, when her colour rose in a gush over face and throat. She had done precisely that which had offended her good taste in Captain le Gryce. She had made him ridiculous before his inferior. Angry with herself, ashamed of her bad manners, she crumpled up the letter. Her only excuse was the provocation she had received from Le Gryce and the irritation caused by the reappearance of Samson.

A second summons at the front door called for it to be opened, and a little old lady was admitted, who tripped towards the staircase with "Never mind me, Eliza; you need not usher me. I know my way very well."

The lady ran half-way up the first stage, then paused, looked at Georgie, returned, and said, "So! the new companion. What may your name be?"

"My name is Thirkleby."

"Have you been in service before?"

"No."

"Millward was a good woman, but over-officious. They had to get rid of her. You are young, too young for the situation."

"I regret that Miss Chevalier did not consult you previous to engaging me. It was a lamentable oversight."

"How do you get on with my dear friend?"

"Would it not be best to learn that from her?"

"What are you doing here? Who is this soldier? Is he a brother or a cousin?"

"I will answer such questions when put to me by Miss Chevalier."

"No offence meant. My name is Bilbie. Now allow me in all frankness to give you a piece of advice, kindly intended. I trust you will receive it in the same spirit. Remember your place. Never presume."

The little lady flourished her finger at Georgie, and tripped up the stairs and left her.

"Now," said the girl to Samson, "I pass on Miss Impertinent's recommendation to you. Remember your place. Never presume. Your place is in the awkward squad, and it is presumption in you to come here repeatedly, and above all gossiping about me to the servants."

"Are not the maids more civil to you than at first?"

"I prefer their pertness combined with ignorance. Now go—and come here no more."

"I cannot go. I am to await Sir John. I have a letter to deliver."

"A duplicate of mine, doubtless. Your master is in an apologetic mood to-day."

"Hah!" exclaimed Samson, his face flushing and his whole body agitated with strong emotion. "You complain of me talking. It is I who have to regret it. I would I had bit my finger off before I told my captain who you were. Before he knew, he was all for running his sword through the body of your fine baronet."

"What do you say?" asked Georgie, clutching the banister and turning cold.

The answer was delayed by another arrival, that of the Revérend Emmanuel Hirsch.

"What name?" asked the parlour-maid, and when she failed to pronounce it, "Shay it as if you wash schneezin'—not Hirss but Hirsch," said the Jew.

As he passed Georgie on the stairs, he leered at her and would have spoken, but she drew away, and looked over the banister into the well of the staircase. He uttered a grunt and went on his way to the drawing-room. As soon as the parlour-maid had withdrawn—

"Now," said Georgie, "tell me at once what you mean."

"I mean what I say. When my captain returned last night he was very angry. He had had a quarrel with your baronet —all about you. He told me so, and it was just as if it must come to fighting. My captain is a great man with the sword, and he is just as good wi' the pistols. He said that, said he,

'I will either pink him in the liver or put a leaden ball through his heart.' Them was his words."

Samson stepped forward and drew close to the foot of the stair, whereupon the girl, without thinking, retreated a step upward. This he noticed immediately, and in his fevered, jealous mood resented. He burst away from his subject to exclaim, "Oh, you stand too high for me, I reckon, and must look down on such as me! It was not so once, when we was at Wellcombe and played marbles together."

"We were children then."

"It is since you have known this baronet that you have taken these airs on you and put on a dislike to me. You scorns and despises me as dirt!"

"Indeed, I do not despise you, Mr. Furze."

"Mister Furze!" sneered the private. "It was Samson once, but now your Royal Highness Mister Furzes me. I will not have it. I am not to be treated thus. You thought nothing of your royal blood at one time, or were ashamed of it, till you came to know this baronet."

"Samson Furze, be reasonable. Do not speak in this way or I shall withdraw altogether. At the moment I endure your impertinence only in consideration of old times, and because I want to know further about this quarrel."

"Oh yes, about this quarrel!" said the young man savagely. "You are vastly concerned lest Sir John should get a scratch; you squealed out at Ashburton when I drew a little of his blood. If Captain le Gryce had not shown the white feather now, he would have spotted him like a hare. That frightens you, does it? I would to God I had not said a word of who you are, and then I should be carrying a challenge and not that beg-pardon."

In his heat of anger and gall of wounded pride Samson pressed nearer again and put his hand on the banister. Georgie again backed a step.

"I am not fit to breathe the same air," pursued the angry man, "not to stand on the same footing as your High and Mightiness." He rattled the banister as he spoke. "Thank God! I have something to boast of—I come of honest blood in an honest way, and our simple folk at Wellcombe value

that above all the royal blood that has overflowed its channel and run down the gutter!"

"Furze!" exclaimed Georgie, turning chalk-white with anger, "stay in the hall and deliver the note, if it must be. But I shall take good care that if you show your face here again you shall be kicked out of the house."

Then she turned about, went slowly upstairs, her heart beating furiously, entered her bedroom, locked the door, threw herself into a chair, and covered her face.

CHAPTER XLII

TO JERUSALEM

GEORGIE sat for a quarter of an hour in her bedroom brooding over her troubles, hot with resentment against both Samson and Le Gryce, alarmed at the thought that a duel might have been fought on her account.

Samson's story had been incoherent, but it was plain enough to her that the quarrel of the previous night had threatened to produce serious consequences. Sir John had reproached her for fighting her own battles and not leaving it to men—as himself—to fight them for her, and this was the result.

A tap at the door and a message from Miss Chevalier, that she would be pleased if Miss Thirkleby would descend; there were several ladies who desired to be introduced.

Accordingly, having composed herself as well as she was able, Georgie went down.

On opening the door of the drawing-room she saw that a good many persons had arrived, in addition to those who had passed her on the staircase. There was the dean talking to Miss Chevalier, an amiable gentleman with a pasty face encircled by whiskers of white hair like the moon on a foggy night.

Her appearance caused a general arrest in the conversation, and all eyes were directed towards her.

Miss Bilbie at once trotted up to her with a smile of the utmost friendliness, and held out her hand. "We are old acquaintances," she said, "and need no introduction."

She was followed by Mrs. Hornblower, who made a formal

salutation and said, "We have had the pleasure of meeting, though not of speaking. I am charmed to make your acquaintance, which I trust will ripen into friendship. My first husband was the Honourable Vincent Flower, son of Lord Macturk. No doubt you have heard of my family. I mean that of my first husband—the Flowers. I shall be soon hoping to see you at my house. My daughters will love to make your acquaintance."

The rest of the ladies pressed forward, treading on each other's heels, elbowing each other out of the way, not waiting to be introduced by the hostess but introducing themselves. And Georgie could hear asides: "How *distingué*!" "Do you mark the likeness — in the lip, the profile?" "What a princess-like carriage!" "How beautiful!"

She preserved her coolness and was courteous but reserved. Miss Chevalier fluttered in and out among her guests whispering, smirking, nodding; whilst the missionary put his finger to his white, or partially white, cravat, and loosened it about his throat, whilst he held up his chin in the air and moved his lips like a fowl drinking.

The dean, bland and self-conscious, began sentences, but had to drop them, owing to the audience having their attention diverted from him, and the topic on which it had been called together, to making the acquaintance of Georgie.

After a while, however, he was able to recover his ground. He cleared his throat, and announced to the ladies and gentlemen — of the latter, besides the dubious Hebrew specimen, there was only one present, a banker — that they were assembled for business.

"Come by me," said Miss Bilbie, holding Georgie by the hand. "We will sit on that settee together. The dean will open proceedings."

"No, that will not do, Miss Bilbie," said the Honourable Hornblower. "You are not to engross our dear Miss Thirkleby. I claim her as belonging to me."

The dean promenaded with a swinging walk, till he had cleared a little space in the middle of the room, and then,

poising himself on one foot with the other raised, as if about to prance, he began—

"It is a proud and a pleasurable moment for me to have to speak a few poor sentences in this elect and pious assembly. You will all hear—I shall hear—what Mr. Hirsch has to say relative to the repatriation of the Jews; but yet allow me to remark that I may not be able wholly to agree with everything that he advances. Miss Chevalier, we are indebted to you for the pleasure which we assure ourselves that we shall derive from listening. The speaker on this occasion is not my poor self with a faltering tongue, but a converted Jew, who will dilate on a subject of, I may say, supreme importance. We all know that the restoration of the Jews will result in the revivification of the Gentiles. I am well assured that the speaker will be well able to instruct, admonish, and please us — not that I shall be able to endorse all his views and sanction all his arguments. I give freely my presence here, in the attitude and position of a hearer, and I beg you to give him good attention. Not that you must suppose I admit total and unqualified acquiescence if I make no articulate protest. I am a listener, and I reserve my opinion. With this proviso let me introduce to you the Reverend Emmanuel Hirsch."

The speaker indicated now advanced. He was in shabby black, his linen crumpled and by no means clean, and his chin unshaven.

"I am," said he, shaking his legs and then stretching and adjusting his arms, as though his garments incommoded him, "I am de organising zechretary of de socetat for de rebatriation of de chosen peoble in dere own land. Allow me to shake 'ands."

He went directly to Georgina, who retreated and placed her arms behind her back.

He smiled greasily at her, with palm extended.

"I should like," said she, "the rehabilitation of the Jew before we proceed to his repatriation."

Finding his advances were not accepted, Mr. Hirsch turned, holding out his hand to others.

"Sir," said the dean, "to some of us, at least, time is

precious. We have come to this house at some inconvenience, at an early hour. May we ask you at once to open the subject. Not that I would force you unduly—but that you would consider the value of our time."

"It ish well," said the missionary. "Ach! it is fine, de prophecy. De chosen peoble is all to go back to Jerusalem, de city of David—dat have been trodden underfoot of de Gentiles. But we must help de prophecy to come true. We must put our shoulder to de wheel and make prophecy come true. We must give monish to make it come true. We sall put our feet on de necks of kings, and we sall have queens to be nussing moders to our leedle families. Ach! Miss Chevalier, and ladies all, ve sall all have leedle families. But how sall we get to Jerusalem? Dat will take ships. And ships will take sailors. And de sailors will take monish. There we want of you 'elp. Ladies and shentlemen," flapping his elbows, like a waterbird trying to rise, "you sall assist us—we sall see."

An interruption was caused by the arrival of a lady, Miss Fullolove, a feeble person who looked as though she had been put in a copper with soda and had been drawn out limp with all the colour washed out of her. The Jew waited, then resumed his discourse.

"Ach! It ish wonderful! But it will cost moche monish. I have an idee. It is a beautiful idee. We of de house of Israel be all of de tribe of Judah and of Levi. But where be de oder tribes? Let us find de oder tribes, and let us all go 'appy and loving and reconciled togedder to Jerusalem. And I tink I know where to find de lost tribes. But it will cost moche monish. I must find de arguments. I must search de libraries. I must examine de manuscripts and mummies. I know ver' well I can prove de English peoble to be de lost tribes, and we will then all go back togedder to Jerusalem. Ach! it will be lovelie. Ach! it will be deleecious. But it will cost monish for each to prove to belong to a lost tribe. To prove all dat I must examine manuscripts and mummies. I must get on my stomick and crawl under de coronation throne at Westminstaire. I must examine de Jacob's pillow which is dare wid a microscope. And the authorities at

Westminstaire will want to be feed—will ask for monish. But consider, my dear ladies, I will show you, if you will find me a little payment, to what tribes you belong. I will make it plain, I will prove all dat. I will write it all out on pepper. But it will cost moche monish, and den we will all sail back in our boat togedder to Jerusalem. Oh de 'appy time! Oh de glorious season! We will all love one anodder so! and we will sit under der vines and fig trees, togedder, and de Gentiles shall serve us wid chocolate and sherbet. I have a beautiful broder, who will go wid Miss Chevalier. And ach! dis young lady, they say has de blood royal. I will prove—I will show"—

At that moment the door opened, and the parlour-maid, looking in with a frightened face, said to her mistress, regardless of the impassioned speaker and his periods, "Please ma'am, you are wanted immediately!"

"I—I wanted!" said Miss Chevalier. "I am engaged. I cannot attend. Run, my dear Georgina, if you will be so obliging, and see what it is."

The girl rose to obey. But the maid continued to urge—"If you please, miss—you really must come. It is something dreadful."

"Dreadful! What is dreadful?"

The speaker had ceased. He stood with his mouth shut, looking reproachfully at the hostess and indignantly at the maid. But he seized the opportunity to shake himself in the ill-fitting garments into what would be, momentarily, greater ease.

The maid said something in a low tone to Georgie, who uttered a cry; her face at once expressed horror, and she rushed from the room.

"What is it?" again inquired Miss Chevalier.

"Please, ma'am, it concerns Sir John. He has been hurt."

"Hurt! How hurt? What do you mean?"

"Do, ma'am, please, ma'am, come and see."

The old lady reluctantly went.

"It really appears to me," said the dean, "that we ought not to remain. Not but what the alarm may be"—

The door opened. Georgina entered with a face white as a sheet.

"Miss Chevalier desires me to ask you kindly to go," she said, in a restrained voice. "A most shocking event has taken place. Sir John has been stabbed."

CHAPTER XLIII

TO JERICHO!

"MY nephew, John! Oh, good gracious me! What will my servants do?" exclaimed Miss Chevalier on reaching the hall, where she saw all the domestics assembled about the door into the captain's cabin. "What is it? What has happened? How did it take place? Where is he?"

"Please, ma'am," said Thomas, the lady's maid, "the young soldier Furze has been waiting in the hall with a letter for Sir John, and when Sir John arrived, ma'am, he called Mr. Furze to him into his private apartments. The next we heard was—that is to say, Eliza it was, she was in the hall—she heard an exclamation, and then Furze dashed out, wild like, ran to the door, and in a moment was out in the street. Eliza, thinking something was the matter, calls Sarah Jane, as it is her place to attend on the young master, and Sarah Jane she was at the top of the house, and Elizabeth Anne had to go after her. When she came down, she went into Sir John's room, and found him fallen on the floor and bleeding terrible. She was dreadfully frightened, and we was all scared. Will you go in, miss? Cook is with him. She did not mind. But there be a lot of blood about."

"I go in!" gasped Miss Chevalier. "I am physically incapable. I faint at the sight of blood. What was it all about?"

"Please, miss, no one knows."

"Oh, how dreadful! how appalling! Is it mortal?"

"I do not know, miss. No one of us can tell. Perhaps cook may—she is in with him. Shall I call her out?"

"No—no! not on any account. She must remain with John—and there may be blood. I cannot bear the sight of it. Has a doctor been fetched?"

"No, miss. We did not know whom to bring. Your doctor, Bacon, is away, and you don't like his assistant, Mr. Masham, because of his principles; and Dr. Brett is not in the cathedral set, and has a practice only among lower-class people, so we thought we had best consult you."

"Where is Miss Thirkleby?"

"Please, ma'am, she have run away, and not even put on her bonnet nor goloshes, and it be raining streams."

The dean now descended the staircase. He was a kind man, and, aware that something serious had taken place, he came to offer his assistance. Before leaving the drawing-room, however, he had advised the visitors not to leave in a rush, as the entrance hall was full, but to wait a couple of minutes, and then go away one by one, and pick up their mantles and umbrellas in the hall quietly and separately.

On reaching the foot of the staircase the dean inquired what had happened.

"Oh, Mr. Dean!" gasped Miss Chevalier, "so dreadful! My nephew has been hurt, stabbed, they tell me, and by quite a common soldier, and there is a lot of blood."

Miss Chevalier, frightened and incoherent, pointed to the captain's cabin and said, "In there!"

The dean at once entered and shut the door gently behind him.

Next moment Georgie arrived, followed by a medical man, the surgeon who lived five doors off—that same Mr. Brett who was not in the cathedral set.

When she had learned what had happened, without a moment's hesitation, without asking a question, Georgie had flown for a surgeon, who, as she knew, lived hard by, having seen the brass plate on his door.

She conducted Mr. Brett at once to Sir John without looking to see who were in the hall, and regardless of the summons of Miss Chevalier to go to her.

"Oh, dear! Oh, dear me!" moaned the lady, sinking into a chair. "Thomas, I feel faint! If the worst should happen I do not know how I should bear it. The title and property would go to a man I do not care for, and who has never called on me."

Georgie opened the door of the cabin, carrying a jug.

"Elizabeth Anne, cold water at once," she said, and leaving the jug without re-entered the room.

Miss Chevalier again called, but the call was disregarded.

"Really!" said the old lady, "I have a right to know what is going on. No one seems to attend to me; I cannot get obeyed in my own house. I am dizzy. Thomas — some eau de Cologne."

"What a nerve she have got!" exclaimed the parlour-maid. "I'm willing, but I couldn't do it."

"I wonder, now," said Miss Chevalier faintly, "when those people will come down."

The people alluded to were her guests, and were on the move.

They had been counselled by Dean Hedges not to increase the confusion below by a descent in a body, with its concomitant—a scramble for hoods, goloshes, umbrellas, mantles, and shawls.

The Reverend Emmanuel Hirsch had seized the opportunity.

Stepping between the whole party and the door he said, "Ach! dis mosh not be so. I am come long way. I have the coach paid. I go to mein hotel. I was invite here to speak, and I was told I should 'ave some monish. I am moche sorry if any ding 'ave 'appened, but I cannot back to my place go widout monish. Dear leddies! make now a leedle collection for me, and den you shall all trigle out one by one."

"He is right," said the Hon. Mrs. Hornblower, snatching up a papier-maché card tray and presenting it. "Let me solicit subscriptions."

Miss Bilbie precipitately caught the receptacle for alms from her. "Indeed, indeed, Mrs. Hornblower, we cannot permit you, you of all people, to go about with this tray. It

is my place as treasurer and local secretary. You must positively resign the dish, and pray start the subscription. The plate stands with you."

Mrs. Hornblower grew dark in the face with chagrin.

"I am so sorry—I have left my purse behind," she stammered.

"Oh, that is of no consequence," persisted the malicious little lady, with a glance out of the corners of her eyes at the rest. "Mr. Burnett, the banker, is here." She tossed her chin towards an elderly gentleman with a long arched neck, and the hair of his scruff rubbed away. "He will honour your cheque. Write your name on this scrap of paper for the amount."

Mrs. Hornblower, confused, groped among her skirts.

"How very fortunate," she said. "I really have my purse with me after all—but, bless me, there is no more than a crown in it. Take that."

"The widow's mite," said Miss Bilbie. Then, in place of making the round, the little lady took her station at the door, opposite Mr. Hirsch, who greedily eyed the coins as they were dropped into the tray, and each contributor was then permitted to leave the room.

The descending driblet, walking as if at a funeral, saw the servants gathered in the hall—irresolute, distracted; Miss Chevalier in a chair with eau de Cologne applied to her temples and a green cut-glass bottle of smelling salts to her nose.

The procession slowly advanced, and the foremost members recovered their articles of apparel.

Mr. Hirsch in the rear, however, dashed past the rest, with the card tray in his hand, that he had snatched from Miss Bilbie.

"Ach! dere is de dear leddie!" he exclaimed, presenting himself before the hostess. "I must insist from you for a leedle contribution. I did come at your request"—

At the same time the dean issued from the sickroom, and addressed Miss Chevalier.

"My dear madam, I can report to you the condition of your poor nephew. I grieve to say"—

"You will hab to give me some monish! I was invite here to speak," interrupted Mr. Hirsch, "and de Jews dey be looking eberywhere for 'elp, for 'elp from you."

"Will you oblige me by standing back?" said Dean Hedges. "At the present moment we are too much engaged to listen to your advocacy; not but that at another time"—

"But yes, I say," urged Mr. Hirsch, "I must have my monish. You are a decan! You ver' rich. Potz donner wetter you must give me some 'elp. De leddies ab 'elped, and sall you a shentleman, an elderly shentleman, a decan, 'old your 'and?"

"Mr. Hirsch," said the dean, "may I trouble you to stretch your legs and make the best of your way to Jericho—at once?"

Then, turning to Miss Chevalier, "My dear madam, your nephew has received a bayonet stab. The wound is serious and ugly, and there has been a considerable effusion of blood. Very serious consequences are to be apprehended should any vital organ have been touched, but yet I will not say that this is the case. Under the most favourable circumstances his recovery must be slow, and will be full of risk of relapse. He will require the most careful and assiduous nursing."

"But where—oh, good gracious me! where shall I find a nurse? My poor maids have their feet and hands worn to stumps—and I doubt if they have the courage. I do not know where to look for one."

"Do not let that concern you, Miss Chevalier," said the dean. "Miss Thirkleby has offered—and the surgeon and I are both struck with her remarkable aptitude, her nerve, her coolness, and her quickness of apprehension. Not but that I think it would be advisable as well to have a woman whom you should call in to assist, so as to relieve her occasionally."

"May I hab your leedle subscribtion?" The voice of Mr. Hirsch was audible, and the tray with the clinking coins was thrust under the chin of the dean. The missionary had been executing a revolution, going about among the servants soliciting help to meet his pecuniary liabilities and to further the cause of the return of the elect.

"Will you go, Mr. Hirsch? Will you go?" asked the dean irritably. "There is a time and a place for everything, especially for the advocacy of so sublime a cause. Far be it from me to throw cold water on it, but at this time and here we have other matters engaging our attention. Ladies," said he, addressing some of those who lingered on although beshawled and beclogged, in the hopes of learning something further of what had taken place, "ladies, we shall have the pleasure of meeting again on a more auspicious occasion."

The dean bowed to Miss Bilbie and the rest—Mrs. Hornblower had already withdrawn.

"Ach, Mr. Decan—your sub"—

"Mr. Hirsch—to Jericho with you—and be hanged—not but what"—

At that moment from the nether world rose the boy who cleaned the boots and knives, in wild excitement, and bursting with news.

"I say!" he cried, "here's a go and a to-do — at the barracks, that there Private Furze have gone and shot hisself through the 'ed."

CHAPTER XLIV

IN HER HANDS

THE surgeon, Mr. Brett — he was not entitled to be addressed as "doctor," but such distinctions are not attended to by the ignorant—was a middle-aged man.

He drew Miss Thirkleby out of the sickroom into the adjoining library.

He was short, thick-set, of a muddy complexion, with quick dark eyes, poor features, and was in the intermediate condition between shaven and bearded. He might be either with advantage. The indeterminate condition was unsatisfactory. He wore a brown coat, grey waistcoat, and black trousers, as though in dressing he had caught up and assumed portions of three different suits, and his trousers were frayed at the feet.

In manner, as in appearance, he was uncouth, yet there was a force and straightforwardness in his dealing and speech which impressed on those he addressed a conviction that he was a man of ability.

His deficiency in polish, his ungainliness, and disregard for his exterior had stood in the way of his being taken up by the best-class people in the town.

"I don't know who you are," said Mr. Brett, when he and Georgie were together in the library, "whether a sister, cousin, or a servant."

"I am neither of the former and something of the latter—a companion."

"Nor do I know your name."

"Thirkleby."

"Well, then, Miss Thirkleby. If you are going to undertake the nursing of this case"—

"I am."

"Then I will tell you plainly and precisely what I want."

"You will oblige me."

"Oh, it is not to oblige you. It is what you must know. If you won't do it, leave it alone. If you will, then obey to the letter. Do you hear? I will enter into no surgical details, because they would be Chinese to you. What is your experience in nursing?"

"None, but I may have aptitude. I have good will."

"So be it. Then, no fads of your own—mind that. As far as I have seen, but that is little, you are likely to suit. Practically, the life or death of the patient will depend on you. Divide the chances of his living by four. Three of the chances are in your hands, in mine only one. As to the surgical treatment, that is simplicity itself. I have but a plain course to take, and I will take it. The great responsibility will rest with you. Look at that man in the other room. If he is alive six days hence he will owe that life to you—under God; not to me. Any fool who has passed the College of Surgeons could do my work as well as me. You understand this?"

"Yes."

"And you undertake this enormous responsibility?"

She hesitated but for a moment, drew a long breath, and said, "Yes. There is no one else. Cook is kind and willing, but she is not absolutely trustworthy, having a failing. As to the other servants, with the best intentions they would be hampered by their duties in the house, and of their qualifications I know nothing. Oh, if I had Alse!"

"Who?"

"An old woman at Wellcombe."

"Write for her. This case will be a long one."

Georgina considered for a moment, then said, "The servants would be liable to be called away and interfered with by Miss Chevalier. If I undertake the case—but undertake it I do—then let it be understood that I take my orders from you and from no one else. For the time I must be free from Miss Chevalier."

"That is right. I will see to it. Now attend."

The surgeon looked to see that the door was closed. The cook was in the room with Sir John.

He moved into the window, and Georgie accompanied him.

She laid hold of one of the thick green curtains of rep and gripped it. She was nervous at the prospect of the responsibility she had undertaken, but she was desirous not to allow it to be seen how timid she was.

The surgeon's plain face was grave, and he now spoke to her with slow emphasis, pausing between each sentence to ensure that she took in what he said, and assimilated it.

"The wound is serious. Its gravity must not be disguised. The thread of a cobweb is all that the life of the patient hangs on, and we must see that this thread holds. A vital organ has been touched, but not pierced. What I dread is a sudden effusion of blood—the rupture of a vessel, in fact—and that the patient bleed to death. If what I fear takes place, not the ablest man in the profession could save him. He would be dead in a quarter of an hour. It will be sudden, and the end inevitable. Now you know the danger. Next, as to what must be done by you. All depends on this. He is to be kept quiet. There will be fever, he may become delirious. Restlessness is what I dread, and yet restlessness is inevitable. He must be handled most gingerly. He must not be allowed to turn and toss in his bed. He must be kept cool and be soothed. It is a most fortunate, providential element in the case, that this affair took place where it did, in his own bedroom. Had it happened at a distance, and it had been necessary to transport him to his home, the result would probably have been fatal. You are listening?"

She nodded.

"Nature has great recuperative powers. If he can be kept from violent movement, and from agitation of the mind, which might superinduce restlessness of the body, and that for a few days, I trust we shall be able to pull him through." He paused and added gravely, "Under God's blessing." Then he proceeded with his directions.

"Everything, humanly speaking, depends on the preservation of quiet. I can be of little assistance. I shall call in twice, perhaps thrice in the day. But his life actually reposes

in your hands. It lies with you to keep him as nearly motionless as may be. Put away every disturbing element, let no person come near him who may fidget him. A cold wet cloth, dipped in fresh spring water, and wrung out, applied constantly to keep down inflammation, and renewed repeatedly. Also, if his brain be excited, cold water and vinegar on his brow; that is what you will have to look to. Do you understand?"

"Perfectly."

The cook put in her head.

"Please, sir, the missus wants to come in, now there's no dreadful sights."

"The very thing to be prevented," said Mr. Brett. "I will speak to her."

The surgeon and Georgie returned to the bed-chamber. Miss Chevalier, satisfied that no blood would be visible, had entered the room already, supported by the dean, and would have rushed to her nephew and kissed him, unless held back by Dean Hedges.

"Oh, my dear John! How terrible! What a prodigiously shocking affair! Tell me all about it. How came that wicked young man to do it? And fancy!—he has shot himself, and has gone into eternity with all these crimes on his head, and broke up our meeting also for the Restoration of the Jews. How are you feeling now? The case is not so grave as has been represented, I am sure."

"The case is every whit as grave as I have stated," said Mr. Brett, "and, madam, it is absolutely necessary that my patient be left alone and not disturbed. I forbid any running in and out of this room."

"Forbid!" exclaimed Miss Chevalier, bridling up. "Forbid! in-deed!"

"If I am to have the management of the case, I must manage it as I think proper. Unless my directions be carried out, I cannot answer for the consequences."

"I desire further advice," said Miss Chevalier, nettled at the peremptory manner of the surgeon.

"That is as you please, madam."

The dean saw that want of tact on the practitioner's part

and touchiness on that of the old lady were likely to lead to a scene, and that disadvantageous to the sick man.

He interposed.

"My dear old friend," said he, taking Miss Chevalier's hand, "you must understand that in sickness the medical practitioner is entitled to be a despot. Far be it from me to say that where there are complications no second advice should be sought. But the question is—are there complications?"

"I wish for a consultation," said Miss Chevalier, "that my mind may be set at ease."

Sir John turned his head on the pillow and said with a smile, "My dear aunt, I have absolute, unqualified trust in my doctor. Allow me, so long as I have my faculties at command, to decide in this matter. I place myself unreservedly in the hands of Mr. Brett."

"And pray, who is to nurse you, John?" asked the old lady.

"I have offered my services—and if you will allow me I will write for a woman at Wellcombe whom I can trust, to come to my assistance."

"Really and upon my word!" exclaimed Miss Chevalier. "What do you know about nursing? Where is your experience. Have you ever had any?"

She paused for an answer. There was none.

"No, indeed, I cannot hear of this. It is very romantic and self-devoted, and all that; and knowing, as I do, who you are, I appreciate the offer with profound gratitude. But I must have at least a nurse whom I can rely upon as having been accustomed to such cases. And then — to send to Wellcombe for an assistant. It is too absurd! I know nothing about her. I will not hear of it. No, Miss Thirkleby, no. If the case is as serious as is represented, it would not be right to have anyone here but a duly qualified person."

"Madam," said Mr. Brett, "I know but too well what hired nurses are. I have had sad experience with them. There is not one in this town I could trust, with whom I have had to do, as I am sure I could trust Miss—Miss—I forget her name."

"Stay!" said Georgie, stepping forward. "It is for Sir

John to decide. Can you listen to me, Sir John, if I put the case plainly?"

He smiled and said "Yes," and looked at her.

"It is this. Your condition, Sir John, is most critical. Your life depends on your nurse more than on your doctor; and depends, further, on your being kept perfectly quiet. Your nurse will have to watch you night and day, and restrain you, if restive. I will do my utmost; I will do everything exactly as the doctor orders, and nothing beyond. I will shut the door against everyone I am not allowed to admit. I will not shut my eyes nor leave you for one hour. I will give you your medicine to the minute. That is what I can and will do. On the other hand, I am ignorant, I have had no experience. I am timorous, and I am stupid. But I know where I am ignorant, and I have a will, and if I will to do a thing—you may tear me to pieces before I will give it up. Now, Sir John—choose what you will have."

"You will not leave me. I can have no other choice but you," said he. "As I have an absolute, unqualified trust in my doctor, even so have I an absolute, unqualified trust in my nurse. Dear aunt, allow me the sick man's privilege—to have my way. I have chosen my surgeon, and—"

"No, indeed, John. Miss Thirkleby brought him here without consulting me."

"Now he is here, I am convinced I could not be better off. It is another item in my debt I owe to Miss Thirkleby. Allow me, aunt, to choose my nurse."

"I wash my hands of it," said Miss Chevalier. "If you die, no blame attaches to me. I would have done my best—she will be responsible."

"And if I live," said Sir John, "to her I will owe that life."

CHAPTER XLV

A NEW OCCUPATION

AFTER some demur and several tergiversations, Miss Chevalier accepted the situation, moved thereto mainly by the persuasion of Dean Hedges, who took pains to induce her to acquiesce in what his common sense assured him was the best arrangement.

The little he had seen of Mr. Brett had impressed him favourably. Every man is inclined to admire his own opposite. Partly due to his position, partly because congenital, the dean was a man who never pronounced a decided opinion without providing it with back doors for evasion. He could not make a statement without smothering it in qualifications. In Brett he was brought face to face with a man who knew his own mind, and spoke what he thought with directness and decision. And, for the same reason, the good old gentleman was profoundly struck with Georgie. He himself could no more take a straight line than a man with the palsy could draw one.

Reluctantly Miss Chevalier was induced to submit to be excluded from her nephew's chamber till he should be pronounced convalescent, and she was persuaded to allow Georgie unlimited control over the sickroom.

Miss Chevalier was a lady who treasured a grievance, which she hugged and dandled. She was a lady, moreover, who loved to perform this operation under the eyes of her friends. She disliked being left long alone. She must have someone to whom to talk, above all who would pet her and make a fuss

with her. If she had not a visitor, she must have a companion; if deprived of a companion, she fell back on a servant.

"As everyone is aware," said she to Thomas, "I am Sir John Chevalier's aunt, and I do think that in this matter I might have been considered and consulted. But everything has been taken out of my hands. Yet, should the worst happen—which God forbid—all the blame will accrue to me for not having insisted on engaging the services of a competent surgeon and of a professional nurse. No one thinks of that. It will be cast at me from all sides, and how can I excuse myself except by saying that I acted as the dean advised; and yet I know him so well, that, when that happens, he will wriggle out of it and leave me to be the object for general reproach. Happily, I am the meekest and most forbearing of women. But I have my feelings, and they have been hurt, though I allow no one to see it. We must have the street littered with straw and the door-knocker tied up in chamois leather. Will you see to that, Thomas?"

"I beg your pardon, ma'am, but it is not my place."

"No, to be sure. Of course not. I did not mean you to do it, but Sarah Jane."

"I beg your pardon, miss, but the upper-housemaid has nothing to do with the doorstep or knocker. That belongs to the under-housemaid."

"Of course, kindly tell her."

"I beg your pardon, but that will hardly do, with all respect. They will not take orders from me. If you will allow me, ma'am, to ring the bell you can tell the parlour-maid, and she will convey your orders to the upper-housemaid, who will communicate them to the under-housemaid."

"And," said Miss Chevalier, "we must have a paper stuck up with '*Kind inquiries at the Back Door.*' Do you think the under-housemaid would be good enough to affix that?"

"I will see, ma'am. If not, I daresay the gardener can be got to do it."

"By the way, Thomas," said Miss Chevalier, "I am a little

uneasy about Miss Thirkleby. She is nursing Sir John, and my daily, hourly prayer is that he may recover. But it strikes me that he may suppose such a recovery is due to her attention, and gratitude may ripen into an attachment. Of course, if it is as you say, that she is of illustrious birth, then"—

"Please, ma'am, I only know what Private Furze said."

"But, goodness gracious me! suppose it were a delusion; suppose that he only fancied it. And the unfortunate and miserable man cannot have been sane. Then the case would be very serious. I should never forgive myself for allowing Miss Thirkleby to nurse my nephew."

In the meantime Georgie was engaged in attendance on the wounded man.

She was quiet in all her movements, unobtrusive in her attentions, and did not speak unnecessarily.

For some time Sir John was alert to what was going on, and considered that much more was being made of his case than it deserved. The inflammation attendant on the healing had not yet set in.

"Miss Thirkleby," said he, "if I had not used that twist and turned up his hand, just as I did at Ashburton—do you remember?—when I knocked the foil from his hand, he would this time have inevitably written Finis with his bayonet-point to the silly little story of my life. I was speaking to him about his tittle-tattling in the kitchen, and his annoying you by his visits. Then, I do not know what took me, but I went to the hearth to poke the fire. You know aunt's funny way. She never allows the bright poker to be used—it gives trouble to the servants to clean it. So in the corner is always a dirty little crooked bit of iron for use. To humour her I employ this. Well, whilst I was standing with this wretched concern in my hand, all at once Furze whipped out his bayonet and struck at me, a down stroke. By instinct rather than thought of danger, I dealt a twist to his weapon and jarred his hand, but not before he had sheathed it in me."

"You must not talk, Sir John."

"I cannot help it! It is all so funny and so inexplicable. What on earth can have set the young fellow

"YOU MUST NOT TALK, SIR JOHN"

against me? Was he accounted right in his mind at Wellcombe?"

"I will not answer your questions. You must not speak. I shall go into the next room. I am nurse, and as despotic as the doctor."

CHAPTER XLVI

THE DEAN'S DISCOVERY

SIR JOHN'S condition remained without aggravation throughout the day, but during the night he became feverish, with a disposition to restlessness.

He slept at times, and at other times was mentally confused, uttered incoherent words, and turned his head from side to side on the pillow, without, however, making any attempt to move his body.

In the early morning the cook good-naturedly came in to relieve Georgie.

"I have brought you, miss, a cup of hot tea and some buttered toast," said the woman, with kindliness in her tone, "and I do insist now as you go and lie down."

The utmost, however, that Georgie could be induced to yield was to go into the adjoining library and lie there on the little sofa, with a rug—the Astrakhan rug given her by Sir Thomas—drawn over her. Anxiety, even then, prevented her from even dozing.

"You see, miss, this can't go on," said the cook. "It may be you have writ for someone to come to you from Wellcombe. But her can't be here for some days, and if the young master has to be watched and nursed, we must have you peart so as to do it. There now, shut your eyes. If anything 'appens, I will call you."

But sleep she could not, and sleep she would not. Her mind was too active, her heart too full of care. The fear was ever on her lest in an access of pain, not realising what he

was doing, he might start up in his bed and attempt to leave it, with what result she had been forewarned.

However, as the night drew towards day, and that deeper drop in the temperature took place which precedes the coming of dawn, he became more easy, his brain clearer, and his temperature less hot.

During the afternoon the dean called; Georgie heard his voice in the hall, and he tapped at the door. She had no scruple in admitting him; he was gentle and considerate in his movements, his voice regulated, and his address not exacting.

The young baronet, looking at Georgie, said, "Whilst the dean is here would you mind going to my aunt, Miss Thirkleby, and conveying to her my affectionate remembrances, and you will comfort her by my assurances that I am better?"

"Very well," answered Georgie, "I will do so; and, Mr. Dean, may I ask you ere you leave to pull the bell three times sharply. That is a signal agreed to between us for the cook to come."

Then she left and quickly entered the drawing-room, where was Miss Chevalier.

That lady might have noticed that the girl's self-assertion and defiant manner had passed away, had she not been too much engrossed in herself to observe anything.

"My dear Miss Thirkleby," said she, partly rising from her easy-chair, "how is my poor boy? I have not slept a wink all night, thinking of him."

"He is not worse, and considers himself better."

"And you—were you up the whole of last night?"

"Yes—that is, till five, when cook came."

"But you must positively go to bed this ensuing night. Of course, I can pay for a suitable nurse, and shall be pleased to do so, if allowed."

"I cannot abandon my post. I have undertaken to nurse him. I promised both him and Mr. Brett."

"Oh, Mr. Brett! He is nothing. You must not wear yourself out, or I shall have two sick persons on my hands, and that would drive my servants into revolt. They are very

good and willing, but they must not be imposed upon. If money were an object—but it is not"—

"I have been so bold as to write for Alse Grylls. I can trust her, but till she arrives I positively must stand at the helm."

"I cannot think how you can endure it," said Miss Chevalier. "It is stuffy in a sickroom. I myself cannot bear it for more than a minute. A hired nurse is paid to inhale the atmosphere."

"When you are anxious about the patient, and know that his life depends on you, you forget about the stuffiness."

"I could not do it. And there is really no need for it, when persons can be hired for the purpose. I trust you have some interesting books to read whilst in the sick chamber."

"So far I have not needed them. Sir John demands incessant attention. Cloths dipped in ice-cold water must be applied every few minutes."

"I could not do it. I am sure it would kill me."

"Or the patient," said Georgie—and at once regretted her tartness. But Miss Chevalier had not noticed the observation. Then, hastily, to cover the rudeness of the aside, Georgie said, "You must understand that his condition continues most critical. Mr. Brett says that it is a toss-up whether he lives or not. Everything depends on a vessel that has been grazed but not cut into."

"Don't!" besought Miss Chevalier, "I cannot endure details. They produce faintness in me. No one loves John more than I do. His mother, were she alive, would not more long to be at his side. But there are physical impossibilities to which one must give way. Whatever money can do I will do, and do cheerfully."

"After to-night I shall be willing to have assistance. But to-night is one of too vital importance for me to think of being elsewhere. Mr. Brett says that the turn may occur then. The fever increases towards nightfall. At present Sir John has his senses about him, and I can manage him easily. And even if he becomes very restless"—

"If you cannot control him you must have help."

"No. Violence would be fatal. If I cannot keep him

quiet, I will have none to hold him down. Nothing will avail. I will do my best, but if he gets beyond me it is all over."

"Do you mean to say that he will die?"

"Yes, I do."

Miss Chevalier had hardly realised before how extreme was the danger. She remained silent a while. Then she said, "Do you say that it is possible he may die whilst you are in the room."

"Certainly."

"And perhaps in the middle of the night?"

"I cannot say when."

"But you would be alone."

"Yes—alone."

"It cannot, must not be. If poor John were to—I mean if the worst were to happen, it would be too awful for you to be alone, and for me also."

"You would desire to be summoned? You shall assuredly be called."

"No, no; I have never seen anyone die. I could not bear it. I should never get over it. But to be alone in the night with a dying person!"

"Why not?"

"It would be too awful."

"Why so?"

"Why so? Why, I cannot explain"—

"If Sir John does die," said Georgie, "I had far rather be alone with him at the time than have the room full. I judge by my own feelings. If I were dying I should desire to have no one with me, except perhaps one whom I could trust, who would hold my hand and let me pass."

"Don't talk like this. I am a bundle of nerves. I feel too deeply. I am all heart. It is unfortunate—it stands in my way of rendering such assistance as I should like."

Georgie, with the thought impressed on her of death, had lapsed into a reverie. She roused herself by an effort, shook herself, and, recovering from the relaxed position into which she had sunk in the chair, said, as the door opened, "Well, he must not, and he shall not, die! We must trust in a

skilful surgeon, careful nursing, and finally and supremely in strong beef tea."

"No," said the dean, entering, "not finally in that, nor firstly either, Miss Thirkleby, but first and finally in Him in whose hands are the issues of life and death."

"I meant," stammered Georgie, "after the crisis is over—then comes in the beef tea. After all, that is the great thing."

"Oh, Mr. Dean," exclaimed Miss Chevalier, "you have seen him! You think well of him? Miss Thirkleby has been making me positively ill with her lugubrious anticipations."

"I have just come from your nephew," answered the dean, looking irresolutely from the old to the young lady, as if uncertain to which he should address himself. "I am no judge as to the condition of his wound, but I think that I may say that it is advisable for his nurse to return—not but what she may have done quite right in coming here. Indeed, Sir John desired it. And I pulled the bell three times, and may I venture to ask whether the cook—I mean whether—far be it from me to suggest unnecessarily and uncalled for, that things are not right. The eye may be mistaken, but not when the nose proclaims the same fact, bears the same testimony. But yet"—

"Good heavens!" exclaimed Georgie, bewildered in the tangle in which the dean was involving himself and his hearers, in his efforts to avoid making a positive statement. "What *do* you mean?"

And without waiting for an answer, understanding only that something was wrong, she darted down the stairs to the sick-room, to find that the cook who had taken her place—was tipsy.

CHAPTER XLVII

FOUND

GEORGIE'S heart darkened as though a blind had been drawn over it, and she said to herself, "No one else shall be with him—none—till Alse arrives."

She looked at the patient. He was fevered, purple spots were on his cheeks, but he smiled when he saw her.

"I am sorry—very sorry," said she. "Cook is good-natured, and very willing, and I thought better of her. But she has a great fault, and that has revealed itself too soon. You shall not be left with her again."

"She would have turned me out of bed under the plea of making it," said Sir John. "And when the dean interfered she called him a reverend old cock."

"She shall trouble you no more," said Georgie. "I am going to give you a cold compress at once."

"It was the dean's face—he, accustomed to the adulation of the chapter. It shook me with laughing. I could not help it. And he ran out of the room."

Georgie remained with the sick man the rest of the day. She took a book of travels from the library and, at his request, read aloud to him.

But he did not seem to hear much of the lection; sometimes he dozed, at other times was light-headed. Yet, even if not following, the sound of her voice soothed him, and he roused and asked for a continuance when she ceased, thinking he was not listening.

The dusk of the winter's evening fell brown and sad. She could read no longer. Then the housemaid came in with the

gardener to offer assistance, and Sir John allowed the latter to raise him whilst his bed was made comfortable. The man whose hands had to do with plants, whose fingers dealt with the delicate fibres of their roots, could be trusted to be gentle, tender with an invalid. He was available at any time of the day when wanted. Georgie had observed him, and was satisfied.

"You need not light the candles," said she to the maid, when the latter was preparing to leave, "the flicker of the fire will suffice for a while. I shall require fresh cold water the last thing at night before you go to bed."

"I beg pardon, miss," said Sarah Jane, "shall you require any help in the night? Me or Elizabeth Anne will sit up, if you wish it. Cook is very sorry—she is liable to be took in her lower limbs, and the knees give way. When them fits is on her, she's just like a daddy-long-legs—all the strength seems to go out of them. I've known her shut up like a clasp-knife on the kitchen floor. It's the climate is so terrible relaxing."

Georgie declined the offer, kindly intended. The maid would have drawn the curtains, but Georgie restrained her hand, and when the woman was gone she seated herself by the window and looked out into the gathering gloom.

As she sat in silence and darkness her soul heaved and fell within her like the ocean under a night and rayless sky, when there is no wind and the neapy waters do not break into a ridge of foam.

Her feelings were vague, agitated, but inarticulate. But they were powerful and deep, stirring her to the grounds of her nature.

A change was being wrought within her, of the direction and character of which she was unaware. Hitherto she had been wayward and callous, but wayward only because always allowed to take her own course, and callous only because she had never been brought in contact with suffering.

As she had been reared she had felt no restraints, for none had been imposed upon her. She had never truly loved; her uncle had repelled her, and the regard with which she had looked on her inferiors had never gone deep.

Now she was confronted with a duty—as she conceived it.

She could not doubt that Sir John had received his wound on her account, through the mad jealousy of Samson Furze.

The young baronet had been nearly involved in a quarrel with Captain le Gryce, that might have cost him his life, on her account. Therefore it was an obligation laid on her to attend to him in his then condition.

And she liked him. He had behaved to her with a respect to which she was a stranger. Among her uncle's rude associates none had shown her deference except Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, and his treatment of her was formal.

Now that she had made the charge of Sir John Chevalier her own, the whole intensity of her character was gathered on one object.

If there was any feeling in her heart warmer than gratitude, she was unconscious of it. If her life hitherto had been purposeless it was because no worthy purpose had been proposed to her. All at once an object had appeared that called for the exercise of her faculties of mind and heart, and she pursued it unreservedly. It was as though all the dispersed and unrecognised forces in her nature had suddenly been drawn together, and impelled in one direction. When Moses smote the rock, the water gushed forth and overflowed the arid soil around. A touch had melted Georgie's hard heart, and it streamed with pity.

Sir John was tossing, turning, throwing about his arms and muttering.

She went to him at once, and laid her hand on his brow. It was burning.

"You must remain quiet," she said decisively.

"I am sorry ; I thought they were going to drag me about. I have lost myself—your hand is cold, and gives me ease. I can collect my thoughts whilst you hold it there. I have been on fire—it is breaking out at my side, and has caught the sheet. I can smell the burning."

He was slipping away again into delirium.

"No," she said, "you are fevered. That is all. I will cool the fire."

And she applied a wet compress.

Then she heard the house bell, and next moment the surgeon was ushered in.

"In the dark?" he said.

"Yes; I thought the light might tease his eyes. But I will kindle the candle at once."

She went to the mantelshelf for spills.

"How is our patient?"

"Restless and suffering, sometimes light-headed."

The candles flared up.

"Let me inspect the wound. Yes. Hold the light better. He is very feverish, and the place angry."

"It appears to me," said Georgie very gravely, "that it will be, as you more than hinted, a critical night. Can you remain here through it?"

"No; I have a poor woman to attend to in her trouble."

"What! a common woman?"

"A common woman if you will—certainly not a lady by birth, nor wealthy."

"But—but surely you might leave her to your assistant."

"I have none. My practice is not sufficiently good to allow me one."

"But—the more important case should command your attention."

"Quite so—the more important. The woman is a blacksmith's wife and has already three children, of whom the eldest is five. There will shortly be another. She is a frail creature, and the case is a serious one. If she be taken, who will attend to four helpless little ones? The husband is all day at his forge, and may not abandon that. Has Sir John the same claims?"

Georgie was silent. At first her lips were drawn tight, and her brows contracted; she was angry. But they relaxed, her eyes filled. "You are right, doctor," she said in a low tone. Presently she added, "Oh, I dread the night!"

"Will you not have one of the maids with you?"

She shook her head.

"They are helpless. Well-intentioned, that is all. I do not want one weaker than myself, but one stronger."

"Physically? How about the gardener?"

"No—no—no! I do not require him."

She paused. An access of trepidation, of failure of strength had come on her. Mr. Brett looked at her.

"One morally strong, do you mean?"

"I do not quite know what I mean. I feel the responsibility; and I feel that I am not as brave, as enduring, as stout as I supposed, and as I desire."

"Shall I find you a hired nurse? It is late."

"No—I do not want that. Here is a noble, good young life, full of promise, full of possibilities. It is left with me."

She blew out one candle.

"Do you see? In moments such as this I feel like one drowning—clutching and can find nothing."

"Nothing?" repeated Mr. Brett. "Look to God."

She stared at him. She had the second candle in her hand, that was still alight. Her hold was unsteady. It shook, and the wax ran over her fingers. She heeded it not.

"Miss Thirkleby," said the surgeon, "I hold with you that a turn one way or the other will take place this night. We are at the close of the old year and the dawn of the new. Let us hope that with the year that comes in will come the confidence that the worst is overpassed. I will promise you this, as soon as the trouble is over with the blacksmith's wife I will return here. It may be at midnight, it may be in the small hours. I do not require a servant to sit up. I will come to this window and rap. Then you can open the front door and admit me."

"I shall expect you," she said, and breathed more freely.

Then he went away.

For some time her patient was quiet. The house was retiring to silence. The maid brought in cold water, looked at the fire, saw that the coal-box was replenished, and laid a tray with some provisions for the night.

Then again she asked, "Miss, are you sure you will not have one of us with you?"

"No, Sarah. See, he is sleeping. I shall do well."

In another hour stillness had fallen on the habitation. The mistress and the maids had retreated to their several bedrooms.

An occasional passer-by could be heard in the street, his feet crackling the forming ice on the pavement, for the wet had changed to a frost.

The thought that she was alone, the only one waking in that great house—the only one save the black beetles rustling over the kitchen floor—oppressed her. She opened the chamber door and listened. The throb of the clock on the stairs was louder than it had sounded during the day. It was the pulse of the house.

She had drawn the curtains together, to exclude the darkness, to shut out the reflection in the glass of the candle and the fire, that were as winking eyes watching her.

She seated herself by the bed in an arm-chair and looked at the sick man. The light played over his face, the fine-cut profile seemed sharper than usual. She started, dropped on her knee and listened, with a stop of her heart, at the thought that he might be dead.

Then he started, cried out, and beat with his hands. He was striving to lift himself, and his eyes glared with internal fire.

"You shall not drag me out! I will not be taken from bed!" he cried.

Then he cast himself down and put his hand to his side. He was tearing at the bandage.

"Sir John!" said Georgie, "Sir John, listen to me—to me —your nurse. You must not! No—no—in pity to yourself, in pity to me!"

She held his burning hand down on the bed. He no longer recognised her. Yet still she had some control over him, for he allowed her to hold his hand. She held him there for more than an hour. Ever and anon he was restive. She had to be hurried in her action when she dipped the cloths, but then coolness always relieved him for a while.

It seemed to her presently that the water had lost its chill. It had not the same effect as before. She might not leave the room for a fresh supply.

She drew back the curtains and threw up the sash, that she might spread the cloths on the sill and expose them to the frosty night air.

The cold breath of night poured into the room, and seemed to relieve the sufferer, at least momentarily.

There was a lull. But it preceded more violent struggles. He was striving to get at his bandages, to heave himself in his bed. His words were disjointed and meaningless.

"Sir John! Sir John! I do pray you rest! Be still, your life depends on this."

But he heeded her not.

Then all at once the bells burst forth in a peal. The old year was over, and the new year came in with a merry rush of music from the towers of the old cathedral city.

"I hear the church bells!" exclaimed the sick man. "It is parade. I must to church."

He was struggling to rise.

She held him down.

"Sir John! it is the new year. The old year is past. The new year is coming in with health to you."

Still he heeded her not.

The dew stood on her brow, the tears hung on her lashes. His strength was beyond hers, and her voice had lost its power over him. The call of the bells was more potent.

She would have gone to the window to close it, to draw together the shutters and the blinds to exclude the music of the towers, but she dare not leave him for one moment.

The effort to restrain him was more than she could bear, and yet unless he were held down and prevented from rising all would be over, the new year would see him bleed to death, and with its first hour would come his parting breath.

"Take, oh, take something to drink!" she pleaded, putting some lemon juice to his lips; but he brushed it away.

"I cannot manage him! I cannot hold him! Oh, my God, my God, what shall I do?"

Mr. Brett, surgeon, came to the house at three o'clock in the morning. He did not attempt the front door, but, seeing the light stream forth from the window of the sickroom, went to it, and standing without, leaned his elbows on the sill, and looked in.

He saw the sick bed, and the patient lying on it, apparently

resting easily, and on her knees by it, with her head buried in her hands, was Georgie—motionless, absorbed.

He rapped—and presently she turned, saw him, rose and came towards the open window.

"Has he been restless?"

"Yes—very." Her face was swimming in tears.

"And—have you needed help?"

"I have found it."

"Where?"

"Where I never sought it before."

"And you have found it?"

"I have found it."

CHAPTER XLVIII

A MORNING CALL

"MY dear Miss Bilbie," said Miss Chevalier, a few days later, "thank you most sincerely for calling. It is considerate in you. I have suffered acutely. For their own wise reasons I have been excluded from the sickroom. It was considered, I suppose, that seeing me would too profoundly agitate my poor nephew. He loves me, his aunt, devotedly, and his affection is reciprocated. But I have had much to endure. A sickness, and one so severe, in the house sadly upsets it. The servants are run off their legs. My cook has been very poorly ; she took a part in the nursing the first day, and it affected her liver ; she has been ailing ever since. It is a privilege to have such a woman in one's service. She could command any wage in a much larger establishment, but she is warmly attached to me, and her legs are collapsible at climatic changes. She likes a quiet house, a Christian family—and one must not lay too heavy a burden on her, you understand."

"And Sir John, he is really better?"

"Much better. He is mending. But consider my feelings. I did expect Lucy—Mrs. Weldon—my niece, to help nurse her brother, and Miss Thirkleby had written for a woman at Wellcombe—of course, with my consent—for the same purpose. But I learn that Lucy has been dangerously ill with congestion of the lungs. She caught a chill returning from Exeter, and the woman Miss Thirkleby wanted has been nursing her, and could not be spared. Lucy wrote to me in pencil from her bed. I have been torn by anxiety—my nephew and niece

both ill. You can hardly realise what I have suffered, and my cook in a shaky condition also, so that the fish has been quite underdone and inedible, and the mashed potatoes lumpy. When one does have a head and shoulders on salmon, my dear, it is too provoking to see the flesh still transparent and not come away freely from the bones. You see, as Lucy cannot be here, it throws all the nursing upon Miss Thirkleby."

"But the servants assist."

"Oh, off and on. What more can they do in a house? They have each their work cut out. I must admit that Miss Thirkleby is a most efficient nurse, and is devoted to her work. The servants are now prepossessed in her favour. They were not so at first, but by some means she has conciliated their regard, which is a great relief to me."

"And have you not seen Sir John?"

"I have been to him to-day. I had to control my feelings, and Miss Thirkleby guaranteed that the room should not be stuffy. I sat with him a little while. In fact, I was getting uneasy, and felt that it was my duty to visit him. You know what I am where duty is concerned. He has been thrown so much with Miss Thirkleby, that I determined to ascertain how the land lay."

"Yes, and"—

"By the way, you have heard the result of the inquest?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Very satisfactory, on the whole, to me. I should have greatly disliked having myself and anyone connected with me involved in publicity. The poor young man was deranged. Captain le Gryce was able to testify to that. The young man had been a sort of servant to him, and Captain le Gryce assured the coroner that he was quite off his head, and had been strange and freakish ever since he joined the regiment. So they found a verdict of suicide when in an unsound condition of mind, and he could be buried with decorum. It is pleasing to me that they did not have to come fussing here to interrogate Sir John, who was really unfit to be spoken with; and as to my servants, none saw what took place in the captain's cabin. It would have been most offensive to me to have

my house, and my name, and my servants brought into the matter."

"I have not seen Miss Thirkleby since that interesting meeting in your parlour, which was so painfully interrupted. It struck me that she was hardly a person cut out by nature to be a nurse."

"She is greatly changed, much softened, and now really gentle in her ways. I myself did not like her when she was introduced into the house in place of Miss Millward, who really was a most valuable woman. She then seemed disposed to snap one's head off. She is a different person now. The servants have noticed it. Nevertheless, I do from my heart wish that Lucy had been here."

"It would have taken the severe strain off Miss Thirkleby."

"Oh, I was not thinking of that, but it would have been less dull for me. I should then have had one or the other with me to amuse me. I may confide in you—and you will not mention it—but I have had a very great anxiety weighing upon me. Of course, if I knew for positive *who* Miss Thirkleby was, I should have been able to take my measures accordingly. But all about her origin is so uncertain that one does not know exactly how to act. And so much depends on me. When a man is ill, he forms exaggerated ideas as to his indebtedness to his nurse. I find that John becomes fidgeted if Miss Thirkleby is long absent from his room, and he always hails her return with manifest pleasure. Of course, she is very good and attentive, and all that, and one would encourage this sort of thing if one knew exactly that she *is* what she is represented to be. But, if not, then a great danger may ensue. If she be not what has been supposed, I would reward her generously for the pains she has taken, and give her a pretty Lowestoft cup and saucer. But I would most assuredly intervene and not allow her to be so much about my nephew, and perhaps exert undue influence over him."

"I can quite see this," said Miss Bilbie, greatly interested.

"You see," continued Miss Chevalier, "unhappily John's father died, a distinguished officer indeed, but without having done anything particular to distinguish him. He got an

attack of measles at Torres Vedras, and they were neglected, and he died. The late baronet had no brothers, and I was his only sister. He was a somewhat reserved man and did not make many friends, and although a distinguished officer—indeed, he distinguished himself by being the only officer who did die of measles in the lines of Torres Vedras—still, that does not constitute such a claim on the Government that it will do anything for his son to advance him in his profession."

"I see, and yet"—

"And yet," interrupted Miss Chevalier, "as you were going to observe, a man who dies of measles gives his life for his country just as truly as if he fell on the battlefield. However, that is not the light in which it is regarded at the Horse Guards. Unfortunately, the family estate is not large, and the baronetcy is really an encumbrance. Under these circumstances it is most important, indeed it is essential, that John should marry well, marry into a family that has influence, and help to obtain for him promotion and position in which he can distinguish himself. Now, if Miss Thirkleby really has royal blood in her veins, though one may deplore a certain irregularity in the manner in which it got there, yet it might be worth while my allowing this liking to ripen into something warmer. Titles are not now, I suppose, given in the same manner as they were by Charles the Second; but titles are not what we want. There are a thousand covert ways in which royalty might push into notice and smooth the way for the husband of one who is a scion of the house, though perhaps not a recognised offshoot."

"You are not convinced that she is this?"

"No—it is most awkward, and I do not know what line to adopt. Miss Thirkleby turns aside my questions, and will not afford me that information by which to regulate my conduct. I have been so uneasy about this, it has so affected both my sleep and my appetite, that at last I resolved on speaking on the matter to my nephew."

"Do you consider, my dear, that this was altogether judicious? Might you not be putting the idea into Sir John's head?"

"Make yourself easy on that point. Ideas get into young

men's heads without their aunt's putting them there. Besides, I approached the matter with the utmost delicacy. I must protect myself. I have no one else to look after my interests. As it is, everyone who calls inquires about Sir John, 'How is poor Sir John?' and no one considers what a serious sufferer I am. It is the same with these young people. They do not consider how I am affected by this illness; it never occurs to them to consult my inclinations and comforts."

"And how did you approach this delicate topic?" asked Miss Bilbie, seeing that the lady was drifting to matter less interesting to the visitor.

"Oh, well—of course I did not let him suspect that I had marked an incipient liking for Miss Thirkleby. I put the matter on quite another footing. I told him that I was considering how adequately to remunerate Miss Thirkleby for her services to him, and that the amount of remuneration must depend mainly on her social position, as to whether she were what we must all deplore—but great excuses are to be made for members of the royal family — or whether she were a mere nobody, a petty parson's niece."

"And what did he say to that?"

"He answered somewhat ironically. If there be one thing, as a Christian, I detest, it is irony. I told him how I was situated about that Lowestoft cup and saucer, and really they are very pretty, with the key pattern, you know, in pink round the edge. I said that I could extract nothing from her, relative to herself, but that I considered that he, with his opportunities, seeing so much of her, might, with a little tact, worm the secret out of her."

"And how did he receive that?"

"He flared up and was quite rude. He said he was not going in an underhand manner to try and draw from Miss Thirkleby what she was reluctant to confide to me. And as to the Lowestoft cup and saucer, he said that he would know how to acknowledge his indebtedness, and that I need not trouble about the sort of present to be made."

"I do not like that."

"Nor do I either. And now, my dear Gratiana, I am going to ask you a favour. I know that you can amuse John,

you have such a fund of information, and you will sit with him for a quarter of an hour. Meanwhile send up Miss Thirkleby to me. Inform her that I want particularly to consult her about something. I will, positively, get out of her what I require to know. It must be done, and I will do it."

CHAPTER XLIX

THE LAST OF THE "REVELATIONS"

"YOU desire to consult me, Miss Chevalier?"

"Well—consult—that is to say, have a few words with you relative to matters that may be important. I sent Miss Bilbie down to sit with our dear invalid, and to relieve you. She is a most amusing person, and a great gossip. It is a vast change for the better after the tension of the last few days, to know that Sir John is convalescent. What I now dread is a relapse. My nerves have been overstrained, and I know by experience that such a condition leads to reaction and nervous prostration. So soon as my own doctor returns he shall prescribe for me."

"I am at your service for a quarter of an hour," said Georgina. "May I ask you on what point you desire to consult me?"

"Let us say converse together. It is a subject difficult to approach, and yet it is one that must be faced. I rely on you to be frank with me."

"Certainly, so far as I can, without compromise to others."

"Do sit down, my dear Miss Thirkleby. It is so hard to carry on a conversation satisfactorily when one sits and the other stands."

Georgie took a place on a settee over against Miss Chevalier, who occupied an easy-chair. That lady was clearly embarrassed. She took up a folded fan and balanced it between the palm of one hand and the forefinger of the other.

"You see, my dear Miss Thirkleby," she pursued, after some consideration, "that now I shall have a host of callers to inquire after my health and that of my nephew. Hitherto I have seen almost no one, and the solitude has been more than I could bear. However, the darkness is lightening; Miss Bilbie has been admitted. But she has made me anxious. She tells me that there is a great deal of talk in the best circles about you, and I am sure to be asked a thousand questions relative to you. And that will be most awkward for me. I should so like to be able, if the matter is raised, to be able to give an answer as to who you really are. I mean, you know"—

"Nothing is simpler," replied Georgina. "You can say with truth that you know nothing."

"Ah, but that would hardly answer. You do not understand what cathedral circles are like. You see, they are made up not of common but of eminently inquiring minds, and they will not rest satisfied without knowing more."

"Then let them turn their activities to finding out, but not through me."

Miss Chevalier was silenced and disconcerted.

She turned and turned the fan as though it were a spit and she were roasting a joint on it.

Presently she began again: "Let us be frank and pertinent. There is really nothing more delicious than openness."

"Except in a nut or an oyster—in which case it is all give and no take."

"I really, as between bosom friends, desire perfect clearness and precision. I am frankly anxious about yourself."

"How very good of you. I believed that all your anxiety concerned the welfare of a much more important personage than myself."

"You hardly know, Miss Thirkleby, to what extremities you drive me, and how painful it is to me to—to"—

"To be frank and explicit?"

"Not exactly that; but to be delicate in my treatment of a topic that hardly endures touching with a feather."

"I am all attention. I have but five minutes more, and we have not as yet reached the subject."

"We all know," said Miss Chevalier, colouring and twirling the fan rapidly, "we all are well aware, that you have taken a lively interest in our dear patient. Indeed, it has been much commented on in our best, our cathedral, circle. Now interest is so liable, unless rigidly held in check by principle, to develop into—what shall I say?—attachment, which may or may not be reciprocated. If not—then there lies a worm in the bud, blighting the life. But it is also possible that interest ripening into a warmer sentiment may be directed towards an unsuitable object. It is to caution you against this, Miss Thirkleby, that I have ventured to trench on your valuable time."

"You are very kind—your kindness is on a match with your frankness," replied Georgie, with imperturbable countenance.

"Of course, if it had not been for Lucy's illness, I would not have allowed you to run the risk; I am in a measure responsible for you. Then, on the other hand, excuse me for saying it, I must think of my nephew. There is no saying but that in an excess of delirium he might"—

"Throw himself away upon me?"

"I do not put things so broadly. But—of course we must be prepared for contingencies."

"And these contingencies are?— Let us be frank and precise."

"Precise and frank I desire to be, but not rude and brutal. Let me place the matter plainly before you. Sir John has got his baronetcy, and an estate inadequate to maintain him in the position he ought to occupy, having his title. He has to make his way in the army, and must look out to obtain the interest of those who can advance him. The best, if not the only way—now there are no wars—is for him to marry well, with this end in view. To marry otherwise would be quite fatal. I—and now I will be precise and frank as you desire—I must take steps to prevent him committing himself rashly to anyone, unless I know fully who that person is, and whether she can be of use to him by the exercise of her family interest. Of course I know, my dear Miss Thirkleby, whom you are supposed to be, and far be it from me to stand in your way, if you are what is pretended. I presume that you are able to

furnish information relative to your father and mother, who they were, and that this information can be substantiated by documentary evidence."

"Certainly I have all the requisite documents."

"Then, my dear young friend, will you allow me a sight of them, to content my mind, and to enable me to fashion my conduct."

"No, Miss Chevalier, I said that I was able to produce the documents, but I did not hint that I was willing to do so."

"But this places me in a most awkward situation. I must either countenance your continued attendance on my nephew, with its concomitant risks, or I must bring it to a termination, as precipitate as may be."

The door was thrown open, and the maid announced—

"Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt."

Georgie leaped to her feet.

The old knight entered, bowing first with old-fashioned courtesy and a wave of his white beaver to Miss Chevalier, then wheeling, he did a similar obeisance to Georgie.

"I permit myself the honour, madam," said he, addressing the lady of the house, "to call on you and to congratulate you on what I have just learned—the convalescence of Sir John Chevalier. I rejoice, moreover, to be able to announce to you that Mrs. Weldon is much better, and sends the old woman, Alse Grylls, to assist in the nursing of her brother. Madam, you, as a second Cleopatra, as far as charm of manner goes along with personal beauty—you might now say to me—

> 'Give to us a gracious message,
> An host of tongues, but let ill tidings tell
> Themselves, when they be felt.'"

"Ah, Sir Thomas, a Cleopatra without an Antony."

"But not *sans* Charmian," and the knight bowed to Georgie. "Miss Chevalier, I come to your footstool as a suppliant, to ask to be allowed presently, presently only, to have a brief private conversation with Miss Thirkleby about business."

"When you like, Sir Thomas. At once if it please you."

"Nay, not now. Not to break on this delightful intercourse. By and by, by and by."

"Is this business the same as that on which we had some words a while ago?" asked the girl.

"The same."

"Then," said she, "I would request that Miss Chevalier be allowed to be present. The business is, I presume, no other than the offer made me for the surrender of a certain document that is in my possession, the same, Miss Chevalier, about which we spoke just now."

"If you desire it, Miss Thirkleby."

"I do desire that what has to be said shall be spoken in the presence of Miss Chevalier."

Sir Thomas looked chagrined and disconcerted.

"The matter is one of peculiar delicacy," said he. "It affects more persons than yourself."

"It may be so. But as it does affect myself I have a right to demand the presence of this lady."

"Really, Miss Thirkleby," said the knight, "it is a matter of the utmost privacy, and it touches the honour and affects the interest of persons of importance."

"Of importance!" echoed the lady of the house, kindling, tingling with curiosity.

"You may either make the communication before her, or not at all. I do not desire to hear it," said Georgie inflexibly.

"Quite right, my dear," said the hostess. "Of course business transactions should not be conducted without the presence of a witness. Most proper."

"The case is this," said Georgie. She approached the table and stood before the knight and the lady, who had likewise risen. "I am possessed of a certain manuscript written by my uncle, entitled 'Revelations of a Man about Court.' It is accompanied with what the French would term *pièces justificatives*, autograph letters—a correspondence that, I can well understand, it is to the interest of the persons concerned, or such of them as are still alive, to get hold of."

"And this document," threw in Sir Thomas, "I was led to suppose had been placed in the hands of unscrupulous publishers."

"You were not led to suppose that by me—at least wittingly," retorted Georgie. "If any words of mine were so

interpreted by you, then it shows me that you had formed a much lower opinion of my character than I could have supposed possible, knowing me as you have. You have spoken of certain persons, whereby you veil a single person, who is concerned at these incriminating papers being in my hands."

"I have done so. I have made a liberal offer to induce you to surrender them."

"And you have come with fresh proposals."

"I am not empowered to undertake that a larger sum shall be paid; under existing circumstances that is not possible, but indirectly much may be done to advantage you. You will not always remain Miss Thirkleby. At some time or other, with your attractive exterior and your ready wit, you are almost certain to marry."

Miss Chevalier pricked up her ears, and sparkles came into her eyes.

"I will venture to assure you that whomsoever you marry, be he in the church, in the law, in the diplomatic service, in army or navy—shall not be forgotten. He shall be pushed on in his career as speedily as may be, without arousing criticism and unduly drawing attention to the favour exercised. If he be in the church, a fat living and a canonry shall be the first stage in his progress. To a lawyer there are a hundred lucrative positions open. In the army or navy his promotion shall be rapid and certain."

"My dear Miss Thirkleby, what more can you desire?" asked Miss Chevalier, pressing on her eagerly. "Close with the offer immediately."

Georgie stood motionless, considering. Then with a wave of her hand she signed to both to stand back, and, passing between them, left the room. Miss Chevalier picked up her fan, tapped Sir Thomas on the sleeve, and winked.

"I think that I may confide in you that there *is* a prospect of a marriage. You have made her an offer which, by a happy coincidence, exactly meets the case."

"And you are confident that she will accept?"

"Certain. She is not a fool. Your offer supplies the one consideration which would remove my objection to the match."

"Indeed, is it so, madam?"

Georgie entered. She was composed and pale. In her right hand she held a bundle of manuscript.

"This is it," she said, and showed the docket to Sir Thomas.

"Precisely."

"You have stated that the possession of this budget is material to the honour of one of the parties concerned by it. You forgot to refer to the other—that other who cannot now protect herself, and whose life-story is placed in my hands to publish, to proclaim upon the house-tops, or"—she walked to the fireplace and thrust the manuscript among the coals—"or to extinguish for ever."

Sir Thomas started forward.

Miss Chevalier fell back in her chair.

Georgie put the tongs upon the burning heap, and held it there till it was consumed, looking all the while steadily at the glowing mass and the lambent blue flames that danced above it.

Then, gently, Sir Thomas approached her, took the disengaged hand and kissed it, saying—

> "'Give me grace to lay
> My duty on your hand.'"

There was a tremor in his voice as he said it.

CHAPTER L

DISMISSAL

"WHAT!" exclaimed Miss Chevalier, lifting her hands, when she realised what Georgie had done. "Destroyed the evidence!—the proofs as to who you are and who your parents were!"

"I have done so."

"And cast away the splendid future offered!"

"I have refused to give up my mother's story."

"And now—no one is able to say who you are? Not even who your father is?"

"None."

"Then you mean to tell me you are a nobody?"

"A nobody!"

"You have no other proofs?"

"Not another particle of evidence."

"If that be so," said Miss Chevalier, "my duty is clear. I decline, I most emphatically decline, to entertain you any further under my roof. Good heavens! A nobody! of whom none can say who and what her parents were. Thank you, no. It is my duty to protect my poor dear nephew from the insidiousness of a nobody, from the machinations of a nobody. Not again shall you penetrate to his presence. I shall take measures to secure a proper nurse. We are not penniless. We can command the best attentions. When I see my duty clear, I am inexorable in the pursuit. Will you favour me, Miss Thirkleby, by packing up your boxes and making the necessary arrangements for leaving here—at once."

"I am quite willing to go—at once," answered Georgie

coldly. "As to my portmanteau and trunk, I leave them to Sarah Jane to pack, and send after me."

"Miss Thirkleby," said Sir Thomas, with distress in his tone and on his face, "let me place myself absolutely at your disposal. I will conduct you where you like."

"Thank you, Sir Thomas. I shall engage a coach and return immediately to Wellcombe. Mr. and Mrs. Weldon will receive me without question, whether I be somebody or a nobody."

"I am reasonable, Miss Thirkleby," said Miss Chevalier, "but duty sits enthroned above every other consideration. I may seem harsh, peremptory, but my religious principles govern all my acts."

"I wish you good-day, Miss Chevalier, and thank you for such favours as your religious principles allowed you to show me when you regarded me as somebody, and prompted you to withdraw from me, when you discovered me to be a nobody."

She left the room.

Sir Thomas looked on the floor. His withered old face, that usually wore an artificial smile, had fallen, and assumed a very real expression of distress.

"Miss Chevalier," he said, "this is hard, very hard."

"My dear sir," she replied, opening the fan and wafting it, "there are two sides to every question. I feel deeply and with a sharp pang having to thus appear harsh, but I have a paramount duty to perform—the safeguarding of the interests of my nephew, Sir John. Think! if he were to propose to her!—and he regards her very highly."

"Miss Chevalier," said the old knight gravely, "I have known her since she was a child. She has had a detestable bringing up, but has a fine, generous, and noble nature, that needs but kindness and forbearance to expand into something great, lovable, and, as I said, noble."

"I am no judge of nobility where the parentage is unknown," said Miss Chevalier. "Conceive! If John were to propose, she might become Lady Chevalier. How could he make his way in the army with a wife who was a nobody? How could she take her place in society if she were a

nobody? How would the servants regard a mistress who was a nobody? I regret extremely if my conduct do not meet with your approval, with the views of the world. I must act upon principle. Good gracious me! I have not paid her. She will expect her salary a month in advance and board wages. I am prepared to act liberally, and there is a little Lowestoft cup and saucer I purpose giving her as a recognition of her attention in nursing John. Excuse me, dear sir, if I have to leave the room, but I must bar the way to Sir John's chamber. I can suffer no sentimentalities there over a leave-taking."

"And I," said the knight, "I must make my humble apologies and take my leave. She must have a carriage to receive her."

"I will ring and despatch a boy for one."

"I wish you good-day, madam—

> 'Herod of Jewry dare not look upon you
> But when you are well pleased.'"

He bowed profoundly and backed from the room.

Miss Chevalier tossed her chin, muttered to herself, then went to the hearth to rake among the light ashes of the burnt paper, in hopes of discovering some leaves or scraps that had not been consumed, and that might tell some fragments of the lost story of a wrecked life. Disappointed at being able to recover nothing she put down the tongs, left the room, and descending the staircase took up her position in the hall before the door to the captain's cabin.

Three of the domestics were there, whispering. It was obvious that already the fact was known that Miss Thirkleby's reign was at an end, and that she was leaving.

Now that she was in disgrace they were prepared to range themselves ostensibly on the side of their mistress. The only one who did not do this was the cook, who, with faltering nether members had fluttered into the patient's apartment to communicate to him the information that Miss Thirkleby had been ordered to leave.

A few moments later Georgie appeared, dressed for de-

parture, carrying a little bag, followed by two maids with her trunk.

She was cool, and was drawing on her glove with leisureliness.

An exclamation! and an old woman, Alse Grylls, whom Miss Chevalier had overlooked, ran forward to embrace her darling.

"Miss Chevalier," said Georgie, "if I be allowed to make a request that might be favourably considered, I would ask that this dear old woman, who has nursed Mrs. Weldon, may be allowed to attend to Sir John."

"I will see to that presently," answered the lady of the house. "At present I must consider and discharge a little debt. I believe that I owe you a salary for six weeks, and board wages, as I do not dismiss you for any fault, but for my own convenience. Let me see—this comes to three times eight and five over."

Georgie waved her aside.

"But I insist on discharging a debt."

"Give it to your servants—to anything but the repatriation of the Jews."

The bell was rung.

Eliza hastened to the door and opened it. Sir Thomas appeared, and without was a carriage drawn by a pair of silver-grey horses.

"Miss Thirkleby," asked the knight, "are you ready?"

"Why, why, what is the meaning of this?" inquired Dean Hedges, mounting the steps to the front door at the same moment. He removed his laced hat, and rubbed his forehead. "My dear Miss Chevalier! — Miss Thirkleby — all in the hall! Trunk and portmanteau also! — what is the meaning of this—but yet I admit I have no right to inquire."

"Miss Thirkleby is returning to Wellcombe," said the lady of the house. "Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt has kindly offered to escort her, and it has seemed to me undesirable not to seize on such an opportunity."

"But—but—what will our friend Sir John do without his nurse? Surely, Miss Thirkleby, you cannot be so cruel as to

desert your charge. Not but what I suppose there is some cogent reason."

"The best and most cogent of reasons, Mr. Dean," said Georgina. "I am no longer required here."

"Miss Thirkleby, if you are ready, the carriage waits," said Sir Thomas.

"There is yet another to be consulted," said a voice from behind—and, turning, all saw Sir John Chevalier, who had hastily dressed himself, and who stood pale, half clothed, holding the door-jamb, with Miss Bilbie and the cook peering from behind.

"I am not going to allow my nurse to leave," said the invalid. "Come here, Miss Thirkleby."

She went to him at once.

Detaching his one hand from the jamb, he placed it on her shoulder, and stayed himself by resting upon her.

"Aunt, Mr. Dean, Sir Thomas Tyrwhitt, Alse Grylls—all here present—and I rejoice that there are so many witnesses—hear me. Before you all I ask Miss Thirkleby to claim a right, such as none can dispute, to nurse me—the right, the unassailable right as my wife."

"John! for heaven's sake!" exclaimed Miss Chevalier. "She is a mere nobody. She is no good in the least. She has destroyed the evidence."

"She is the somebody without whom I care not to live. Georgina, will you nurse me till I am well? Give me your hand, and, when strong enough, Mr. Dean, you shall unite us. Georgie! give me your hand."

But he did not wait for her to extend her hand. He seized it.

"Aunt," said he, "if you turn her out, you turn me out of doors as well."

"Miss Chevalier," said the dean, "this really seems to be a very practical arrangement—but yet, be it far from me"—

Then said Sir Thomas in a low tone—

> "'I do not like "but yet"; it does alloy
> The good precedence: fie upon but yet.'"

He broke off; he went to the baronet with his formal old

face softened and brightened with real feeling, and with tears in his withered eyes he held out his hand and said—

"God bless you, my dear Georgie! and you, Sir John. I wish you every happiness and advancement. As to the former, it is in the hands of a noble girl, and sure. As to the latter, it is in mine, and I guarantee it. I wish you joy. You have got a true and royal woman."

THE END

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